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# **BEHOLD THE WOMAN ·**

**THIRD EDITION**



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**THIRD EDITION**



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THIRD EDITION





# BEHOLD THE WOMAN!

## A TALE OF REDEMPTION

BY  
**T. EVERETT HARRÉ**  
AUTHOR OF "THE ETERNAL MAIDEN," ETC.

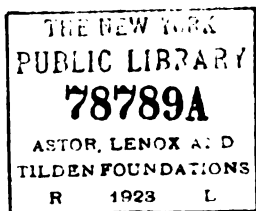
"And behold a woman in the city which was a sinner . . .  
"And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon: 'Seest  
thou this woman? . . . Wherefore, I say unto thee, her sins  
which are many are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom  
little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'"—Luke VII: 37, 44, 47.



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**TO  
EVERY WOMAN  
AND  
ALL SONS OF WOMEN**

**1923**

**JAN**

**TRANSFER FROM C. D.**



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*In that tumultuous and licentious age when paganism and Christianity were engaged in final conflict, when the Church refuted heresies by the sword and carried on the spreading of the Gospel with persecution and bloodshed, a woman—"a woman of the city which was a sinner"—was given to behold that which emperors, archbishops, priests, and monks did not see: the Vision Celestial, and to understand, what the professing and militant Christians of the age did not understand, that all men are brothers and that God is Love.*

*Perchance to-day, when the world is convulsed with wars, when Christian nations are engaged in conflict, armed with the most hideous scientific instruments of destruction ever devised, when rulers blasphemously proclaim they carry on their campaigns of temporal conquest with God on their side, and when the faint, timorous appeals for peace from the Vatican and the days of prayer in neutral nations are drowned in the confusion of battles and rumors of further wars, this book may serve a purpose in recalling the Supreme Message which seems to have been forgotten.*

*In this novel I have attempted to picture an age which was at once the most magnificent, barbaric, cruel, corrupt, and splendid in the history of the world. Rome under Nero did not compare in many ways to Alexandria at the close of the fourth century.*

*Some of you who read my story may find what may seem shocking, brutal, wanton, and terrible. I have written this book in all sincerity, with no attempt at palliation or subterfuge. I have tried to present the age as it actually was in so far as all available sources of information and my own instinct have enabled me. What I tell of the excesses of paganism and of the brutal massacres of the period is true; the depiction of the character of the Christian archbishop and the incredible fanaticism of the monks is historically accurate. But in addition to the ruthless killings, the revengeful ferocity of heathens and Christians alike, the naked shamelessness of*

*passion and unbridled licentiousness, that age was rich in glorious romance, admirable achievements in art, philosophy, and learning, a spirit of beauty in sheer living seldom if ever surpassed, heroisms, dauntless bravery, inspiring sacrifices, breathless adventures, and all the wonder of noble things. I do not agree with that writer who says, "One who writes of such an era labors under a troublesome difficulty—he cannot tell how evil people were." Why not? Are the newspapers to-day constrained, because of delicacy concerning sensitive public feeling, from reporting the atrocities of war? To depict human victory over evil, you cannot ignore or mitigate the evil. To present a great type of redemption, you must tell, without hypocritical concealment, the infamy and shame of the life from which the sinner has been redeemed. No sincere work of literature can be written from the mental angle of any prejudice. No honest artist can approach his work with a consideration for immature or puerile intelligences in mind. This book, frankly, is not written for children, but for men, and the mothers and wives of men.*

*In reading this book you may be disillusioned regarding certain cherished traditions. The early Christians were not all saints; they were human as we who live to-day are human. They were weak, the victims of ignorance, and guilty of bigotry, injustices, and wrongs, even as we are prone to be. If they failed to comprehend the real message of Christ, if they persecuted their enemies, hounded the pathetic women who sinned, and were more intent upon worldly pursuits than those of the spirit, shall we cast stones at them? Can we—without seeking to understand—condemn, when to-day, twenty centuries after the tragedy on Calvary, the Christian nations of Europe are engaged in a slaughter that must rend the aching heart of the pitying Christ? Shall we not rather seek to learn wherein the early crusaders of the faith failed, so that, to-day, we may work to right the awful crimes of those Christian rulers who, in their professed religion and practices, have failed?*

*In Mary, the powerful Alexandrian courtesan, whose beauty in its day was truly the glory of Egypt, is represented the eternal struggle of womankind over man's age-long injustice*

*and exploitation—a struggle to-day finding its expression among those clear-visioned and valiant women who are demanding their right to equal place with men in the affairs of the nations.*

*Suffering every degradation, enduring shame and ignominy as great as had been her glory, despised, condemned, and persecuted, this woman—strong, superb, and noble in the integrity of her womanhood—having sinned and loving much, heard the Voice of One who said: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” And to whom—as once before to “a woman of the city which was a sinner,” the Magdalene—was given to deliver to men the tidings of the world’s first Easter morn—that Truth rises victorious o’er men’s injustice and that Love transcends the grave.*

*Shall not Womankind to-day, having suffered and learned through the ages, and loving much, bring again unto the men who have heeded not the Divine Message, so that man-waged wars shall cease?—shall not Womankind, redeemed and freed from age-long oppression, enter into the councils of the world so that the “divine right” of men to rule shall end, and that—laboring for the welfare and betterment of the race as mother, sister, spouse, councillor, and most benign and gentle of friends—there may come the Reign of Perpetual Peace!*

**T. EVERETT HARRÉ**

**January 1, 1916**





# CONTENTS

	PAGE
AUTHOR'S NOTE.....	7
PROLOGUE—ALEKANDRIA, THE GOLDEN CITY—AND THE WOMAN OF THE SHADOWS.....	15

## BOOK FIRST

### *The First Stone.*

CHAPTER		
I.	FIRST NIGHT OF LOVE.....	35
II.	"STONE HER!".....	46
III.	"SHE BECAME FAMED AS A PLAYER AND DANCER".....	60
IV.	THE MASSACRE.....	75
V.	"GRANT US IN DEATH TO SEE THY FACE, AND ENDLESS JOY INHERIT".....	95
VI.	DAUGHTER AND FATHER FACE TO FACE.....	106
VII.	THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS.....	122

## BOOK SECOND

### *Mary, the Great Courtesan.*

VIII.	THE PALACE OF PLEASURE—AND THE EMPTY HEART....	129
IX.	"AND THE WOMAN WAS ARRAYED IN PURPLE AND SCARLET COLOR, AND DECKED WITH GOLD AND PRECIOUS STONES AND PEARLS, HAVING A GOLDEN CUP IN HER HAND".....	155
X.	THE TOILET.....	163
XI.	THE PROPHECY.....	187
XII.	A LOVE SONG ON THE NILE.....	203
XIII.	A SLAVE GOES TO THE CROCODILES.....	217
XIV.	THE BANQUET.....	224
XV.	THE RAID.....	235
XVI.	"HOW MUCH SHE HATH GLORIFIED HERSELF AND LIVED DELICIOUSLY, SO MUCH TORMENT AND SORROW GIVE HER".....	257
XVII.	THE PILGRIM GALLEY.....	278
		286

## BOOK THIRD

*The Redemption.*

XVIII.	"NEVER HEARD I THUS OF CHRIST IN ALEXANDRIA"...	313
XIX.	"WOMAN, ARISE, THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN".....	345
XX.	"AND THEY, WHEN THEY HAD HEARD THAT HE WAS ALIVE, AND HAD BEEN SEEN OF HER, BELIEVED NOT"	356
XXI.	PENITENT AND PRIEST.....	360
XXII.	PORTALS OF THE SKY—THE ETERNAL BRIDE.....	373
	EPILOGUE .....	391

# **PROLOGUE**

**ALEXANDRIA, THE GOLDEN CITY—  
AND THE WOMAN OF THE SHADOWS**



# BEHOLD THE WOMAN!

## PROLOGUE

It was night in Alexandria.

Save for late revellers, the good citizens had retired abed. Here and there, from over the walls of palace gardens and the inner courts of mansions came the dim, restless excitement of theorbos, cytheras, clanging systums, and feverishly-agitated castanets. Now and then stray bands of sailors and porters, the worse for too much pomegranate wine or Cilician beer, reeled through the streets singing ribald songs. To Alexandria, the greatest mart of the world and the empire's centre of trade, they came on great ships and caravans, from all parts—from Macedonia, Thracia, and Bithynia; from Dacia, Illyricum, and Gaul; from Syria, Spain, and Britain; from the distant parts of Africa, the banks of the Ganges, and even remoter regions of the earth. There were sailors from the land of blonde giants, where the year was divided into a day and a night; traders from an island of pygmies, where the trees were gnarled and diminutive and the Lilliput men had almond eyes. Of all lands and nationalities, they wore contrastingly picturesque garb; they sang in conflicting tongues.

In the convivial atmosphere of reeking inns, where they played dice, pelted one another with oyster shells, and clanked brasses for drab dancing girls, the demarcations of race and nationality were obliterated, and, if unable intelligibly to converse, they could still roar out their doggerel drinking songs, which merged into swinging bacchic choruses not without a fantastic and hilarious—if uncertain—melody of their own. Wandering to their ships or lodgings, their voices trailed into the echoing distances, and silence fell upon the spacious thoroughfares—silence, save when fleet-footed black slaves bore homeward some loudly snoring lord in a curtained palanquin, or when—faint and fugitive, from some crouching haunt in the deeper shadows—there rose the intermittent melancholy intonation of sleepless monks at prayer.

Majestically ascending the limpid African sky, a full moon, gleaming like a burnished shield, fired the atmosphere with a crystal-clear incandescence. In a vast semicircle Alexandria rose out of the translucent sea—a towering range of stupendous masonry. Looming as some phantom-city conjured from the desert sands, the glory and the wonder of Alexandria stood revealed—marvellous snow-white palaces exquisitely simple in the early Doric and Ionic forms of architecture; recent mansions in the barbarically ornate and meretricious fashions of later Rome; huge elephantine piles of older Egypt, many antedating the Ptolemies, some, in curious contrast, modernized by innovations of current art; gilded and gaudily-painted cupolas, pyramidal spires of chiselled stone and more solidly massive marble towers. Out of the mass of flat-roofed dwellings stood forth the Paneum, an observatory enclosing a winding staircase in the centre of the city; the Museum, with its chaste statues and frescoes, the austere temple of Attic learning; the Cæsareum, before it, symbolic, pointing star-ward, the two roseate obelisks which centuries later should be conveyed to two diverse and remote regions of the earth;\* the great Exchange; the palace of the Ptolemies; the temple of Neptune, of gleaming brass and marble; the Soma, where Alexander the Great lay buried; and, majestically aloft on the promontory of Lochius, the Timoneum, where Marc Antony after defeat found respite in the lethe of Cleopatra's lips.

From the Canopic gate on the east to the Necropolis in the west, and from the great Gate of the Moon near Lake Mareotis on the south to the Gate of the Sun overlooking the Eunostos harbor on the north, the city was crossed by two broad colonnaded esplanades. Connecting the mainland with an island at the eastern extremity of the city was the mile-long mole, terminated at either end by two drawbridges supported on marble columns planted in the sea, and through which passed daily massy vessels weighted with merchandise. On the Pharos island a hexagonal lighthouse, four hundred feet high, built of scarlet marble, the wonder of the whole world, rose, spearing the sky. Its great charcoal light, re-

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\*One of which to-day stands in Central Park, New York, and the other on the Thames Embankment in London.

flected by mirrors of burnished brass, beacons to the navies of the world.

Grotesque shadows, silent, sinister, stretched ragged arms across the Agora. The jetty leading to the Pharos island was deserted and stretched, like a reaching arm, over the gleaming sea. Along the parapet, above the quays, stalked slowly the lone figure of a woman, tall, dark-swathed, her grim-set face, revealed in the moonlight, the haunting ghost of the supreme beauty that is of woman; in her eyes, gazing afar with fixed, unseeing stare, the gnawing shame that is of women who prey in the shades of night; the goading ache of the memory of humanity's most dear of perished joys, the dull agony of that deathless, inherent, almost-hopeless hope, which is more awful than despair.

Below the parapet stretched the broad platform of the quays, piled with stacks of timber, bulked hills of corn, and mounds of baled merchandise—the harvest and product of the world. Along the docks and in the open harbor hundreds of ships lifted at their moorings—heavy lighters, biremes and triremes, corn-carriers which supplied the granaries of Constantinople and Rome, towering tier on tier like massive buildings. On the vessels, like sentient eyes, watch-lights burned; but the decks were still, the sailors slept. The only signs of animate life were stray gulls drifting silently over the waters of the harbor.

Far out, their white sails unfurled ready for late sailing, a dozen argosies might have been, for all they seemed, silver galleons *en voyage* for the mystical harbors of the moon.

Amid the labyrinthine shadows on the quay a monk, known to his brethren as Nebridius, paced to and fro, muttering prayers while waiting others of a cenobite community who had come that night from the desert of Nitria to set sail ere dawn on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem.

Midnight was long past. Nebridius had begun to wonder at his companions' delay in coming from the house of the Patriarch, where they had assembled for final counsel for their pilgrimage and whence he had been despatched in advance to



prepare their sleeping places on the galley. The sound of a sandalled footfall on the steps descending to the quay caused him to raise his eyes.

Looking up, he saw the tall, dark-swathed figure of a woman approaching. Given to the cenobites when an infant by his dying mother, Nebridius had grown to youth in the desert, and until this, his first trip into Alexandria, had never gazed upon the face of woman. Timidly he shrank back into the shadow, but not before the woman, seeing him, paused—but for a moment only. Steadily advancing, she came deliberately up to him and before he could move away placed her hand upon his arm.

“I salute thee, monk.”

The voice that spoke was low, sinisterly beguiling, treacherously sweet.

Nebridius had heard of women—of our first mother Eve and how she had tempted father Adam; he knew it was to woman that the snake had made known its wisdom, that woman had brought about the fall of man, the curse of original sin and eternal damnation upon all born of her womb; and that of all her kind there had been but one—she who was sinless—who had crushed the serpent's head. Despite the long fastings and prayers of his childhood and youth, Nebridius sometimes, however, had dreamed of the bewitching evil whom the elder monks so terribly feared; incomprehensible, baleful, the lure of the mystery had often disturbed his virginal dreams; and—though with great anguish and misgivings—his mind had conjured alluring and elusive visions. In hours of deepest contrition he had wondered whether woman was as he imagined her. And now when, out of the night, the strange unknown came unto him and placed her hand upon his arm, his blood, leaping, pounded in his ears. The wings of his soul trembled. Affrighted, bereft of movement, all that Nebridius at the moment knew was that a creature in a crimson mantle stood before him; that, demon or woman, her face, as beautiful as the dreamed-of blessed in heaven, was of a whiteness surpassing alabaster, that her eyes were more poignant than stars, and that her hair, of a curious gold, was more tawny than the tiger's coat.

"I salute thee——" he stammered, his voice breaking in a nervous tremor.

The woman's eyes covertly gleamed greenly with the rapacious fixed purpose of the jungle creature crouching to spring upon its prey. Her eyes could not hide their hate. But her voice was insinuatingly ravishing.

"Who art thou, monk? What is thy name? Whence dost thou come?" she asked with grim softness. "And what dost *thou* here this hour of night?"

To one accustomed only to the sound of the hot winds among the desert sandhills and the intoning of prayers, enthralling music purled in this woman's voice. His own words by contrast sounded harsh in the monk's ears as his lips enunciated a constrained reply:

"I am Nebridius, from the desert of Nitria. This night came I unto the city with my brethren with whom I sail forth on a pilgrimage. They are perchance delayed at the house of his holiness, the Patriarch, where they assembled. For my brethren's coming have I bided here."

Nebridius looked about anxiously, as if desiring escape. The woman's hand dropped from his arm, and her gaze appraised him from head to feet. In her eyes flickered a gleam of inquisitive, faintly amused scorn.

"Thou art young to be a monk, my friend," said she, with beguiling irony. Her hand touched his ill-fitting hair-cloth robe with a gentle caress. "Thou art too fair, youth, to wear so shapeless and unbecoming garb."

Nebridius felt his pulses leap to something insidious in her words.

"I am a servant of the Lord," he muttered nervously. "'They that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.'"

The woman's laughter rippled, and her hand lightly pressed his arm.

"But so fair art thou, thou mightest be of the house of a king." Her gaze lingered on his flushed face. Embarrassed, he lowered his eyes.

"My king is not of this world," stammered the monk fearfully. "'The kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the

people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him ! ' ”

“ Perchance true, but thou art a desirable servitor whatever thy kingdom.” The woman’s voice was low and musically insinuating. “ Tell me—they say thy brethren inflict upon themselves painful mortifications and sleep on thorns. Surely thou art too young and tender to sleep on so unyielding a bed ! ”

With a start the monk hurriedly drew away his arm and retreated a step. A very faint supercilious smile crossed the woman’s face.

“ Thou sayest thou awaitest thy brethren here ? ” she continued, gazing about searchingly. “ Thou settest sail to-night ? Whither dost thou go, young monk ? ”

Without looking at her, Nebridius answered with a rapid intake of his breath :

“ We go hence on yonder galley to Joppa and thence, with treasure, to Jerusalem, where, at the Holy Sepulchre of the Lord, we would celebrate the feast of the True Cross.”

The woman’s eyes glinted with sudden covetous cunning, and her soft voice slightly sharpened.

“ Thou bearest treasure ? Where, oh monk, do thy brethren secure treasure ? ”

Piously Nebridius raised his eyes.

“ Heaven moveth the hearts of the wicked and bringeth the unjust to repentance. Perchance thou hast heard of the aged Philamon, he who was great among the corn merchants of Alexandria ? ”

“ Philamon,” the woman breathed, her smile vanishing, “ he who was great among the corn merchants of Alexandria—yea, and what of Philamon ? ”

“ Perchance thou knowest then ”—the monk’s eyes lighted—“ that Philamon, one of the wealthiest and most powerful citizens of the city, hath long been an example of humility and piety in the service of the Lord ! ’Tis said Philamon was a hard and unrighteous man in the old days, ere the word of truth entered into his soul ; but he heard the Blessed Word and bathed in the spiritual Siloam. Now,

reaching the end of his days, he hath given unto the churches of Asia, Africa, and Rome all the belongings which he possessed—but to none hath he given such gifts as we bear for the temple reared by the great Constantine where part of the True Cross reposes.”

“Philamon—an example of humility and piety in the service of the Lord!” The woman laughed in soft derision. “Philamon—bathed in the spiritual Siloam!” Observing the monk’s start of surprise, she smiled reassuringly. “Thou bearest much treasure?”

The monk responded with naïve simplicity:

“Verily! Rich robes and crowns of jewels for the statues of the Virgin in Judea—’tis said there is a collar of pearls that once belonged to the wicked empress Poppæa! There are chalices of gold and vestments for the churches of the Holy Land, and for the Sepulchre of the Blessed Lord tapestries of gold and silk, caskets of gems worth a king’s ransom, vases of perfumes, and incense and spices!”

“Verily, great treasure—great treasure to be in the guardianship of men pure and untried as thou!” Drawing close, her hand fell lightly on his shoulder, her eyes seeking his with seductive gentleness. “Where is thy treasure stored, young monk?”

“On yonder galley,” said the youth innocently. “’Tis one belonging to the venerable Philamon. Ah, we have much to be grateful for, for all the sailing men enlisted to serve on our ship are converts to the true faith. We therefore shall not have to associate with the heathen.”

“Thou hast cause for gratitude, indeed.” The woman gazed in the direction of the ship—a great, four-masted corn-carrier anchored along the nearest dock, one of its sails unfurled and stirring in the warm breeze. “Are thy brethren not exceptionally honored in thus being given to bear the treasure of the powerful Philamon?”

“Thou sayest it, woman! We are favored indeed! But know thou”—Nebridius’s voice swelled with ingenuous pride—“it was through my spiritual father, the sainted abbot Niobides, that Philamon was brought unto Christ.”

Abruptly the woman withdrew her hand from the monk’s shoulder.

"Niobides, Niobides?" she repeated, sharply. "Niobides—bearing the treasure of Philamon!" Turning away her gaze, "Thou sayest—the—abbot Niobides?"

"Ah, thou hast heard of him!" Nebridius exclaimed, clasping his hands. In speaking of his beloved spiritual father his timidity vanished in a spontaneous enthusiasm. "Since the holy father Anthony none hath attained such a degree of austerity as he! His virtues are as spiritual roses! His fasts are unsurpassed in all Egypt! He hath scourged his flesh! He hath burned himself with irons! He hath given his body to the winds, and storms, and the burning sands! He hath stood upon his feet for forty nights and forty days, praying, withstanding sleep."

"Forty days and forty nights?"

"Yea, truly, his piety hath been a precious example unto us! He cureth the sick, he casteth out devils! Of old, even before the triumph of the Church, he went bravely into Alexandria, leading armies of disciples; he refuted the infamies of the Manichees and led the righteous wars upon the Arians. None was so zealous as he! He drove the scarlet women of the city from their haunts! He ever preached the word of the Risen Saviour, Jesus Christ! Surely, if thou livest in Alexandria, thou hast heard much of him."

Her eyes narrowed.

"Yea, methinks—I—have—heard—of—him." Facing him—"Was this Niobides not once offered for sacrifice at the temple of Serapis, in the great uprising against the Christians?"

"Oh, thou hast verily heard of him," Nebridius exclaimed, "and how, when an evil woman commanded him to the torture, an angel descended from heaven and delivered him!"

"Yea," the woman said, drily, "an angel delivered him!"

With a sudden, almost ecstatic, gesture she clutched her breasts. Observing her emotion, a wave of gladness filled Nebridius.

"Ah, thou art moved by his piety! But hast thou heard all the marvels? How he went once into Alexandria, denouncing the great courtesan and sorceress who held the men of the city in thrall! How he assailed this woman of Babylon against

whom none could prevail! No woman who ever lived, 'tis said, was so beautiful—but know thou, she was a fiend in disguise, and came riding on the Beast of the Apocalypse to make war upon the Church. She glorified herself and drank of the blood of the martyrs! 'Twas she who inspired the terrible massacre of the Serapium of which thou hast spoken. Perchance thou knowest also of her. 'Tis said her name was Mary!"

While the monk spoke, the woman's eyes half closed in an engulfing reverie. Her hand went to her throat as though to choke back a sob. Imperceptibly her figure stiffened with a mysterious tragic majesty. Gazing at the monk as he concluded, through narrowed lids, in a low, bitter tone, almost as if addressing herself, she said:

"Mary—the great courtesan who held the men of the city in thrall? . . . Verily, I know of her—Mary, the glory of Egypt, the joy of Alexandria! Mary, whose breath perfumed the world! Mary, whose fame encompassed the earth, whose face lured men over the seven seas, from beyond the mountains of Kaf! Unto whom came merchants and princes bringing riches and gold and jewels and an abundance of delicacies! Mary, whose incomparable beauty inspired poets to song and who truly enchanted as by sorcery! Mary, who in her age was Helen, the peril of Troy; Aspasia, beautiful as she was wise; Phryne of the Eleusinian festivals bathing in the sea! Mary, who incarnated all men's dreams of beauty, in praise of whom—when she walked the streets—children danced and sang! Who did not know of her—Mary, lily of Bruchenum! Mary, garden of pleasure! Mary, rose of the desert, gate of the Dawn! Evening Star! Mary, whose hands were as silver doves that mate among the apple trees! Mary, proud above all women of Egypt, powerful as any sceptred queen! Mary, in the hollow of whose little hand Alexandria lay, for whom men fought and died! Who hath not heard of her—Mary of Alexandria! Verily, oh, monk, much, too much, have I heard of her!"

Her words were acid with the rage of a bitter memory. Mistaking the sardonic, stinging irony of her voice, the monk declared triumphantly:

"Yes, all have heard of her! And how our holy father, the great Niobides, overthrew her! Armed with the cross, he went unto her palace, where demons had assumed the guise of women and where souls were lured unto hell, and by the power given him from on high was she taken and thrown into prison! Thus were the words of the prophet of Patmos fulfilled, and upon the evil courtesan, the great sorceress, in one hour were her judgments come. Through our sainted father was she utterly destroyed!"

Clenching her hands and turning away, the woman breathed:

"Gods, 'tis he, 'tis he! Avenging gods, deliver him unto me!"

Subduing her rising fury, her features calmed, then, turning, she gazed at the monk with a veiled calculating watchfulness.

"Yea," she said sweetly, "indeed, great was the power given the blessed Niobides from on high! Methinks, fair youth, thy sainted father hath great reward in the fervor of his young disciples! When," she diverted, with a studied carelessness, "dost thou sail with thy great treasure?"

"Less than an hour hence," answered he, again searching the distance anxiously. "Even now my brethren are late in returning from the holy Patriarch."

The woman's gaze flashed after the monk's, but the streets beyond showed no signs of life. No sound broke the stillness of the night.

"How many of thy brethren go on thy pilgrimage?" she asked, reassured.

"Two score," answered Nebridius, meeting the woman's eyes for the first time with full confidence. "We who are favored to go were all selected by the blessed abbot, our father Niobides, because of our works and piety." The monk was frank in his innocent happiness. "We shall all gain much grace."

The woman regarded him with an unseeing gaze. Her thoughts remote, she pursued perfunctorily:

"Art thou not afraid, young monk, to venture far on the great deep?"

He answered with simple candor :

"The Lord hath said : ' Fear thou not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed ! ' "

Revealed in the full moonlight, Nebridius unconsciously drank in the vision of the woman's face, unaware of the ravages that time, and the countless experiences of time, had wrought upon a beauty that truly had once been the marvel of the eastern world, and of which, though extraordinary still, but a haunting spectre remained. He gazed, unaware of the famine that had fed upon itself in the woman's troubled and disquieted heart, of the goading memories that envenomed her soul, unaware of the devouring fever of unassuaged desire and hate that smouldered in her great green eyes. For years Nebridius had longed to behold the mysterious evil of woman ; he had been stung with unconquerable curiosities. And in looking upon a woman now he saw her face was more entrancing than the vague faces of the angelic visions that had come after long periods of sleepless fasting ; her words proved sweeter to his ears than the celestial voices of his trances. If this were woman, then, had his brethren lied ? Never, in all his life, had he imagined anything so beautiful. The sun and moon, the cool of oasis fountains in a parching day, the glory of the pulsing stars at night, the matins of dawn, the exaltation of evensong—none had so thrilled him.

Still contemplating him, the woman said with a subtly engaging smile :

" Surely—surely no harm will come to thee, for heaven must favor one with such faith and youthful grace as thine."

The monk, fascinated, made no reply. Hidden from him during the impoverished years of his boyhood and youth, in all its magical allure and sensuous appeal, the mystery and the wonder of woman now confronted him. He had heard of heinous sins associated with the idea of woman, but these he could not understand. Wherein was woman so evil ? Why a creature so to be feared ? Why did men flee the world to escape her baleful power ? Why was she the burden-bearer of all the sins and misfortunes of the flesh ?

Involuntarily Nebridius found himself asking why, if this were woman, the eternal evil, she was so whitely beautiful, so



like the guardian seraphs who wing their way to earth from heaven. Nebridius recalled a crude figure which Onesiphorus, a monk of his community and a sculptor, had carved out of rock and painted into the likeness of the Virgin, and for a moment he hazarded a doubt as to whether the Blessed Mother had been so fair! Indeed, it seemed that, recalling the imperfect figure, her divine face could not have been quite so lovely, nor her eyes so bewitchingly winning, so meltingly tender, so deeply gentle. And Mary Magdalene—according to the legends, her hair was like red gold. But was it as redly golden as this woman's hair? And St. Euphrasia, and the blessed Sylvia, and the glorious company of women martyrs—those radiant figures suddenly paled in Nebridius's imagination! For, despite his fastings, his body, with its teasings, was young. And innocent of the world, but natively curious, the timorous monk suffered from indistinguishable desires not unmingled with vague misgivings. Had he followed his impulse he would have gently touched the woman, even as a curious child might.

At the monk's failure to reply to her words, the woman's gaze focussed upon his face. She saw his eyes, dilated, fixed upon her countenance. A curious, eager smile parted her lips and, still observing him questioningly, she raised her hand and lightly, tentatively clasped his wrist. The pounding leap of his pulse throbbed beneath her finger-tips. Her hand dropped, and the drooping lids concealed the gratified gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. Her voice thrilled with an appealing sweetness:

"So thou goest to Jerusalem—thou wilt see the great Sepulchre, yea, and the world-famed Cross. Fortunate thou art, indeed!" With a trailing sigh—"Almost, I envy thee."

Unconsciously the young monk's head bent toward her, and in a voice gentle but tremulous, he said:

"Thou shouldst envy no one."

Half-raising her eyes wistfully to his face:

"How can I but envy thee—thou so young, so pure, so unspoiled by the world, already to have this great privilege, to find perchance all that I, less blessed, tired and weary, have sought in vain—peace, peace, and rest of spirit."

She paused and a long, labored sigh escaped her lips. The fragrance of her breath, sweet as the roses of Amatheia, wafted into the youth's nostrils.

"Peace and rest of spirit," she repeated. "Yea, these have I sought, and sought in vain."

Leaning closer, moved by ingenuous sympathy, the monk asked:

"Thou art unhappy?"

Her hands went out in an impotent gesture of despair, and she half turned away. As she moved her garments exhaled an indefinable odor—Nebridius seemed to breathe in the mingled perfumes of enclosed gardens. He experienced delectable dissolvings within him—it seemed as though springs of sweet water permeated his being.

"There is no happiness in the world," he muttered confusedly; "there is happiness alone in the divine love."

"The divine love"—the woman sighed, "yea, the divine love—thou hast found it perchance. But where shall I find it—who will reveal it unto me? Who can teach me—who will bring it unto me?" She paused. Then with startling suddenness: "Ah, couldst thou? Tell me, monk, couldst thou bring this peace, this grace, unto me?"

He stepped impulsively toward her. Her eyes lifted with dissimulated supplication unto his own.

"Yea, couldst thou? But, alas! thou goest hence this night to Joppa."

The sudden sound of sandalled steps on the quay echoed from the distance. Nebridius opened his mouth to speak, but, hushing him with a warning command, the woman, clinging to his arm, dragged him into the deeper shadow of the piled timber. Four sailors, softly humming a song, strolled by in the moonlight.

His mind whirling, Nebridius felt the woman's hands tighten on his arm, felt her heart pounding close to his. As the steps of the sailors subsided in the distance, he heard the woman whispering:

"Yea, thou canst lead me unto grace! Thou canst bring unto me this love divine. Yea, though thou goest to Joppa—thou canst take me onto yonder galley and let me sail with

thee!" Her voice, fiercely tense, was warm and tremorous in his ear. He uttered an exclamation of terrified denial, but the woman breathed, closer and more softly:

"Yea, take me onto yonder galley! Take me unto Jerusalem! Take me to the great Sepulchre! Take me unto the fount of grace! I, too, would visit the holy place! I, too, would see the sacred Cross! I, too, would find thy peace! I, too, would find this love divine! Oh, monk, thou art young, thou art pure, thou art untroubled of spirit! But I—I have known all sorrow. I have known all unhappiness. My feet have trodden the ways of the city! I have endured all the ills of life—all, all! I know no peace. I tell thee, no peace. I am wearied of life. I am wearied of this city. I am wearied of its abominations. I tell thee the streets of Alexandria for me are filled with horrors—memories I can't endure! Oh, monk, there is no stone that does not cry out to me with mockery! I would go hence! But I am poor. I have no home. I have no guide. I have no friend. In all the world there is none who cares for me. Often, often have I longed to go unto Jerusalem, to seek the grace that there abides! Now thou canst take me, thou canst guide me, thou canst teach me, thou canst bring unto me peace of heart, eternal life! Here there is no hope. Here there is no peace."

Frightened, the monk shrank beneath her clasp. Tremblingly his lips stammered:

"No—no! No—no!"

"Thou canst not refuse me! Thou art kind, thou art a Christian; thy heaven brought me unto thee," she whispered with impetuous pleading urgency. "Thou talkest of divine love—give it unto me! I say, give it unto me! I have known the world—I have found no happiness in the world. Thou canst take me unto happiness, perchance—take me with thee unto Jerusalem! Hide me in yonder galley—I can remain in the depths, unseen. None of thy brethren need know. Unto Jerusalem—unto Jerusalem would I go!"

"Perchance," he stammered incoherently, "perchance the blessed abbot Niobides, if thou askest him—he may——"

"Nay, nay!" insisted the woman, shaking his arm in a frenzy. "Nay; 'tis thou canst save me! Thee alone hath

heaven sent to succor me! Thou canst hide me there in the depth of the ship ere thy brethren come. None need know—none, none save thou! Thou canst safely conceal me—on the voyage thou canst bring food to me. I shall remain hidden, I promise thee, and at Joppa, after thy brethren disembark, I can escape. None will know. And there—there, in the darkness—thou canst tell me more of the happiness whereof thou knowest—thou canst teach me of thy love divine, there—there in the darkness we can prepare ourselves for grace together.”

The blood beat in Nebridius's ears with the sound of bells. The woman's trembling body pressed close to his. The warmth of her breath was upon his ears, the odor of her body filled his nostrils. He tried to speak, to say her nay, to put her from him—but his limbs were paralyzed, his lips mute. The words that rose throttled in his throat. He felt himself yielding, and desperately tried to loose himself from her grasp. But tighter and tighter she clung to him.

Through the delirium of his senses, vaguely and far off, he heard, rising and falling in measured cadence, the voices of his approaching brethren. They were singing in Latin a hymn of Ambrose, bishop of Milan:

*Æterna Christi munera  
Et martyrum victorias.  
Laudes ferentes debitas  
Lætis canabus mentibus.*

Through the streets the voices increased in volume as the singers approached. The echoes shuddered through the maze of thoroughfares opening onto the plaza. Lost souls seemed singing some lament of infinite despair in a city of the dead. Although they sang a song of praise and prayer, mournful hopelessness sounded in the sepulchral voices and seemed to darken with dolor the very moonlight. Bereft of strength, a wild, sudden, insensate panic-fear of those who were approaching quaked in the heart of Nebridius. Sobbing with childish abandon, the timid monk threw his arms about the woman as if seeking protection and clung to her.

*Æter rex altissime  
Redemptor et fidelium  
Quo mors soluta desperit . . .*

Before he realized it, with the swelling sadness of the antiphon ringing through his childishly terrified, bewildered soul, the woman, dragging him unresistingly after her, glided from the darkness, and fled precipitately across the quay to the dock where the pilgrim galley lay. Impotent, the dazed monk followed. Breathless, panting, they reached the lowered gang-plank. The hymn of the brethren swelled fuller and fuller. Blind with unreasoning, helpless fright and fear of discovery, Nebridius frantically pushed the woman onto the vacant upper deck. In the lower tiers could be heard the shuffle of seamen's feet.

"Whither shall I go" she panted. "Thou must lead! Hasten, ere we are seen!"

Half-swooning, Nebridius staggered across the deck, drawing Mary by the hand. She fell over a coil of rope, but he dragged her on.

"Yonder—come. We are near!" he gasped.

At the very moment the first of the brethren emerged from a narrow street leading on to the water-front, Nebridius thrust Mary into a hatchway opening into the blackness of the hold.

*Datur—triumphus—gratias.*

It was a long and funereal procession that moved slowly, with measured step, down to the quay. The cenobites walked in double file, barefoot, their heads bowed, cowls concealing their faces, hands clasped upon their breasts.

Before them, held aloft by one of the younger brethren, a great crucifix cast an ominous shadow in the moonlight. Behind, bowing low before the symbol of the world's salvation, walked the most sainted abbot since Anthony, Niobides the good. The shrouded forms of the brethren loomed preternaturally tall, and their attenuated shadows moved by them along the quay like accompanying shades from regions of the dead.

When, having hidden the woman in the nether hold, Nebridius returned to the upper deck, he sensed something ominous and blackly sinister in this procession of his solemn brethren—something alien to life, to the world of the sea,

the stars, and the moonlight. Within his perturbed soul, and for the first time, he experienced a recoiling aversion from those who, since his childhood, had been his friends. Clutching his habit close to him, nervously trembling, he cowered back as they approached. There still rang in his ears the music of a haunting voice—a voice thrilling as the sounds of harps, as variable as lyres. His brain was stained with a crimson delirium, and all his senses danced in a mingled chaos of apprehensive terror and secret-thrilling, uncomprehended delight.

With a cold, self-reproachful shrinking, a resentful fear, he drew farther and farther from the railing as his brethren strode up the gangway onto the ship. Behind the monks followed many of the crew who had been with them in prayer at the house of the Patriarch.

Its sails billowing, the great ship swung slowly round and turned its prow oceanward and toward the sacred goal—the Sepulchre of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem. Standing together near the stern of the upper deck, the monks gazed upon Alexandria—Alexandria, the city of sin; Alexandria, where was being fought the final battle of the Cross;—Alexandria looming above the sea, dwindling in the hazy distance. On their lips was prayer, in their hearts was peace; none but had vanquished temptation and all desires of the world and of women. Led by Alypius, who had studied harmonies in the monastery of Ambrose at Milan, their voices joined in divine song:

Maker of all, the Lord,  
And Ruler of the height,  
Who, robing day in light, hast poured  
Soft slumbers o'er the night,  
That to our limbs the power  
Of toil may be renewed,  
And hearts be raised that sink and cower,  
And sorrows be subdued.

The galley rocked as a cradle on the waves. The wind whined in the rigging like the crying of a child. The hawsers lashed the ship's side, the chain guiding the rudder rattled, the masts creaked. Down in the hold, in a free space amid bales of treasure, by her side a basket of bread and a gurglet of wine brought by the monk she had beguiled, a woman lay

back on a mattress and gratefully relaxed. Through the distant hatchway came the monotone of voices upraised in song:

O Thou, true Life of all that live,  
Who dost, unmoved, all motion sway,  
Who dost the morn and evening give,  
And through its changes guide the day!

Thy light upon our evening pour,  
So may our souls no sunset see;  
Let death to us an open door  
To an eternal morning be!

Merging into the sound of the kissing waters the hymn faintly died away—

Father of mercies, hear our cry!  
Hear us, O sole-begotten Son,  
Who, with the Holy Ghost most high,  
Reignest while endless ages run!

Over the woman's face passed a baleful, anticipatory smile.

# **BOOK FIRST**

## **THE FIRST STONE**

**"HER LIFE WAS A GREAT SCANDAL IN THE CITY . . .  
SHE WAS FAMED AS A PLAYER AND DANCER." — FROM THE  
LIFE OF ST. CERACIUS BY CYRIL OF SCYTHOPOLIS**





## BOOK FIRST

### I

THROUGHOUT all the days of her life—during the period of her eminence under the reign of Theodosius the Great as the most celebrated and powerful courtesan in Alexandria, when princes came to her, with gifts, from far seas, and the world gave homage to her genius and her beauty; during the later days when, despoiled of her position by the triumphant Christians, a fugitive from prison, she was driven to ply her traffic at night in the shadows of the quays, in abominable inns and the dens of the slums, and to that time when the message of divine pardon came unto her soul and, in the burning desolation of the Arabian desert, she attained a purified sainthood that should forever remain an example of glorified regeneration unto all womankind and the world—Mary never forgot her childhood. They were memories, poignantly interpretative of life, of mingled sweetness and bitterness—of days of aloe mingled with days of myrrh.

Mary's mother was a freedwoman, her father a slave. Mary was born within the demesne of a great and good master, who, before she was old enough to remember, died. But the gracious spirit of the mighty lord prevailed after his death; the masters were kindly, the slaves were not driven at their labors, the women had time to sing.

Mary's early childhood was not an unhappy one. She remembered going with her father and his fellow slaves to the market-places along the wharves, near the Gate of the Moon, whence came husbandmen from the irrigated sand-spaces without the city, with donkeys laden with panniers of green vegetables, melons, olives, grapes, fruits of many kinds. The half-grown boys and old men—she remembered distinctly that it was the half-grown boys and the very old men—proffered dates, figs, apricots, tangerines, and handfuls of pistachio nuts and purple mulberries which stained her mouth. The roguish lads teasingly plucked at her garments, and the old men pinched her legs and cheeks.

Mary's father in those days was wont to disappear mysteriously at night, and sometimes he returned to the slave-quarters only when the hot saffron dawn reached jaundiced fingers up over the edge of the desert. He was a great hulk of a man, with huge, gnarled arms, the muscles of which twisted beneath the skin like the contortions of a snake. His face had been hideously disfigured by a cruel master in his youth. His mouth had been slit, his ears had been cut off, and a ring had been inserted through the lobes of his nose. This imparted, in mature years, an ogre-ferocity of mien. His black hair was long and matted like a shaggy mane. Whenever he directed his great, glowering eyes upon her, Mary quailed. Yet he was a quiet man, given to few words; he performed his tasks in silence, and during periods of leisure would stand gazing blankly at the sky for hours in profound meditation.

For a long time Mary was perplexed regarding her father's nocturnal disappearances; she observed that other slaves sometimes accompanied him. One night she asked her mother.

"Thy father hath become a Christian," the woman replied, and Mary observed that her mother's lips trembled and tears came to her eyes.

Mary's mother was a timid, shrinking creature. In her girlhood she had come from Cos, and her waxen-white face and fair hair had charmed the noble lord to whose estate she was brought as a slave. He had loved many women and was surfeited with those of their kind, but the coy white maiden briefly stirred his heart. He made her his mistress, then gave her her freedom. Mary's father hated her mother because of this. The child often found her mother weeping; but she would never speak of what troubled her. Sometimes at night, when she timidly stole near to their chamber, Mary could hear her parents engaged in conversation—the mother tremulant, pleading, the father reproachful, strident, accusing. His voice, when raised, had the hollow bay of a lion's roar.

One night Mary was suddenly wakened. Her heart sank within her as, outlined against the moonlight, she saw the powerful figure of her father at her door. His eyes burned with zeal. Tersely he commanded Mary to rise and dress herself. He dragged her after him through narrow, inter-

minable streets. Finally they entered a dark tunnel, and, traversing a long passage, reached an underground cavern, where, secluded, unsuspected, in the abode of the pagan dead, baptism was administered to the newly born in the Christian faith.

Candles were burning. The ground was mucous and slippery beneath Mary's feet. The air reeked with decay and fœtid exhalations. Mary felt suddenly ill. She clung to her father's hand—for the first time in her life. She heard voices—they seemed like the voices of mourners in dolorous chanting. Through a film of flame and smoke she beheld an aged man with a mitre on his head. His face was as the face of the dead, cadaverously white; his nose resembled a vulture's beak, his eyes were dim and filled with rheum; his thin, thread-like hair fell damply from beneath his pointed crown. His hand, holding a bishop's crozier, trembled palsiedly. He was bent with the burden of years. His voice, the voice of immemorial age, spoke of life eternal.

Like wraiths, taking substance out of the shadows, Mary saw the worshippers increasing in numbers about her. Solemn, frightsome words droned in her ears. They spoke of damnation, of eternal death, of a serpent whose head was crushed. While they were preparing Mary for immersion, an unconquerable terror filled the heart of the little girl. She became large with the illness within her, and wept and screamed. She fought with those about her. Fired with righteous rage, her father dragged her from the place and, upbraiding her with wild words, took her home to the slaves' quarters, where, out of pious zeal, Mary was mercilessly beaten. Her flesh bled. Thereafter she hated her father, and the old man who wore the mitre. More than both she hated the new religion.

Mary's mother refused to become a Christian. She had worshipped Isis and visited the soothsayers and astrologers. Although he pleaded with her, she refused to accompany her husband on his nightly pilgrimages to the underground worshipping-place. Even when, in fits of fanaticism, he loudly threatened her, she timidly maintained her allegiance to the elder deity. It was the one courageous thing of the weak woman's life. She found comfort in what the soothsayers told

her, and she could not imagine anything more convincing in any religion than what the astrologers revealed by the stars. She knew that certain amulets prevented disease; that if she lost any object she had but to appeal to certain deities. She had seen spirits manifest themselves over the steaming cauldrons of the magicians, and, for but a few oboli, she knew that the future at any time could be made manifest by the movement of gold-fish in bowls of water. She feared the sect to which her husband belonged—possibly because she so terribly feared him.

It was upon her deathbed, even as she lay dying, that Mary's father exhorted her mother for the last time to accept the new faith, to be baptized and obtain salvation through the sacrifice of the Cross. Lurking outside the threshold, Mary heard the dying woman's voice piteously remonstrating against being forced into a religion which she could not understand. While the fierce man was declaiming of the terrors of eternal damnation and the punishments that await those who reject salvation, Mary's mother uttered a low, quavering moan of terror. Thus she died.

Peering into the dark room, oppressive with the aura of death, Mary saw her father standing by the couch. For a long time he was silent; then, her heart sinking as a plummet within her, grief and fierce hatred mingling in her child's breast, she beheld her father—out of zealot rancor—spit into the face of the unconverted dead.

From Carthage, where he had studied grammar and the classic poets, Maximilian, the son and heir of the dead master, at this time returned, amid the rejoicing and feasting of relatives and friends, to his home.

Maximilian was a desirable and delectable youth, and his homecoming thrilled the hearts of all the maidens of Alexandria. The lad was gloriously young; his cheeks were beardless; his hair, bound by a golden fillet, was like the tumbled blackness of tree-tops when there is no moon; his eyes were large, liquidly soft, of a velvet blackness, and lighted fugitively in their innermost depths as tropical forests on warm, moist nights flare with the sudden mystery of lightning. The sap of

spring pulsed freshly in his veins; when he walked his lissom body swayed, his step was as resilient as the willows that bent beneath the winds in the great gardens of the palace.

Maximilian's moods were variant, as ever changing as shifting shadows upon the sea. He had steeped himself in the poets, and had read Sappho, Catullus, and Theocritus. In hours of exuberant ecstasy Maximilian himself even wrote love poems. They were dedicated to the women he had met in Antioch, Corinth, Rome, and other cities whither he had journeyed. Maximilian, in common with all fresh and attractive youths, had been petted by many women older than himself—at the sight of him the hearts of many matrons had dissolved within them.

He had found pleasure in their caresses, for being tender he was ever desirous of affection. Even those who were least attractive he had idealized by his poetical imagination; he loved none of these women, it is true—but he was wont to write of them as Troy's Helen, as Diana descending to Endymion, as the Cytherean rising from the sea. Maximilian's youth was, indeed, young, and all the world was enveiled with the glamour of romance.

By day Maximilian, with buoyant strides, explored the vast gardens surrounding the palace, one of the most splendid and spacious in the quarter of Rhacotis. Maximilian enjoyed life—he enjoyed the sunshine, the blue expanse of the sky, the air he breathed. He lay idly by running streams, and as the waters purred over green mosses he beheld white fingers, slender, pink-tipped, delectable, reaching toward him—hosts of maidens' fingers that beckoned from depths below. He saw his own reflection, the passionate scarlet of his mouth, the amorous caress of his eyes, and he knew the rapture of Narcissus in dreaming upon his face. Thus, with new imageries, the lad gazed upon scenes he had known in his childhood; the return to his heritage filled him with brimming gladness.

By night, Maximilian, in languorous reveries, would loll upon a great couch on the terrace. The silence of the night was soft as the hair of dark-skinned maidens. Sometimes the tall poplar trees, stirring in the wind, assumed the semblance of the respiring bodies of lithe and sinuous women. They

seemed to breathe as they swayed gently in the night, and the movement filled him with rapture. When, beneath the stars, he heard the sound of running waters, his finger-tips tingled; when he heard the cooing of turtle-doves in the cotes, he melted with an ineffable tenderness for all the live things of the world.

There were even more exquisite hours—hours when the increasing moon rose over the palace gardens, and world and sky became intoxicant with a luminous effluvia; when the fountains dilated as blown clouds of silver dust, and, redolent with the germinal essences within the earth, a haze, opaque as milk, exhaled from the purling streams and crept, soft and low, over the grass. The air then swam with inebriate fragrances; soft breezes stirred the leaves like half-heard murmurous voices; the white night flowers of the moon opened their hearts and wept drops of nectared dew; alluring shapes from shadowland moved hither and thither, seductively, in the depths of the garden glades; elfin creatures laughed and frisked in hidden recesses; the air was palpably caressive; the sky scintillant with a film of silver. Then frogs joyously shrilled in the lakes; doves ecstatically cooed, and bulbuls swelled with vibrant, almost unendurable, trills. 'Twas then, carried away by the indescribable beauty of the world, by a sheer swooning fulness of living, that Maximilian wept.

One night, when the moon expanded in its fulness, and soared up the sky like a silver-robed goddess, the child Mary crept from the slave-quarters and, moving softly, crossed various courtyards, desirous of catching a distant glimpse of the new master. She had heard the younger women speaking of Maximilian among themselves, and what they said had filled her with curiosity. As she cautiously moved among the blooming shrubbery she began to succumb to the insidious magic of the night, and the milky haze rising over the grass crept subtly into her veins.

Leaving the shadow of the trees, Mary stole on tip-toe along the terrace. Suddenly she paused. Reclining on a divan, she saw Maximilian dreaming upon the stirring poplar trees. She perceived that the lad's eyes were great and gentle, black as night and soft as velvet; that his lips were of a purple redness

deeper than hibiscus blooms, that his bare limbs, exposed by his short tunic, were as lustrously white as the petals of the orange flower. Suddenly enrapt, smitten by his beauty, afraid even to move, Mary stood transfixed, unaware that she was herself revealed in the glamour of the moon.

Mary in years was still a child. Yet already she possessed a beauty rare in the world—a beauty which, whenever it appears, is destined inevitably to inspire and enthrall, to create, dominate, to wreck and ruin, to sway men's ambitions and direct the destiny of men's souls. Mary's child-face was pure Greek in its oval contour, the brow broad and low, the nose delicately ridged, sensitive, fine—it was the face, in her childhood, ere she rose resplendent and mature in her ripe loveliness from the foam, of the Venus Anadyomene. Mary's features were not large, and in every detail expressed a divine, an exquisite, fashioning. Her skin was of a satin softness, as eerily white as the strange blossom that once in a hundred years makes glorious the arid spaces of the desert. Her eyes, fringed by long silken lashes, inordinately long, as black as basinite, were large and widely wondering, and in color of a strange luminescent greenness, green as the greenness of the morning sea. Her lips were small, bud-like, ripely red; her chin softly rounded and delicately dimpled. Her hair, falling over her shoulders, was as tawny as the tiger's coat. It mingled fiery undertones of red and earth-rich golds—all the shades of ruddy sunset light. It fairly burned about her head. Her sparse muslin tunic clingingly swathed the beauty of her immaturity. Her figure, lithe and supple, was as perfect in its curving grace as the marbles Maximilian had seen in Rome. Standing there, awe-stricken, abashed, she seemed like some ærial creature of the moonlight, yet embodying all the softness and lustre and allure of delicious human flesh. The two gazed upon each other, each suddenly, completely, irresistibly enthralled—the master of the gardens, and the daughter of the slave.

“Come hither! By the Graces, who art thou?”

The lad sprang to his feet and, with the nimbleness of a fawn, leaped over the parapet. Terrified, the girl timidly



shrank back. Her head drooped, and her gasping reply was scarcely audible:

"I am Mary, daughter of Luke, the slave."

Step by step she timidly moved backwards. Maximilian saw her little feet glimmering like white-winged doves in the moonlight. His ardent swimming eyes fastened upon her. Deliberately, intently he followed her.

Mary trembled violently. At the moment she felt certain that for her effrontery she would be punished. It was forbidden the slaves to invade the precincts of the gardens save when summoned. Although she was not in bondage, by reason of the terms of her mother's freedom, Mary was nevertheless restricted by the rules governing slaves and children of slaves.

Maximilian gazed quickly about, and Mary, mistaking his searching glance, thought that he was about to summon one of the slave-masters. With a sob of terror, she turned to run. But before she went ten paces Maximilian overtook her. Laughing, he seized her hands and held her.

She struggled in desperation, but, failing to free herself, she tried to speak, to beg the master's pardon, to plead that he be merciful and save her from being scourged. But her voice died in her throat.

She felt the lad's breath upon her face—it seemed as hot as the winds of the desert as they blew by noon over the walls of the city. The moon seemed to magnify in the sky; the milky haze rose up from the grass and encompassed her. And before her, laughing in sheer surprised delight, she saw the boy's handsome face, his parted lips revealing gleaming teeth, his glad eyes devouring her. Fear gripped her heart with chill fingers. She wanted to cry out piteously, to plead with the youth—but only a gasping sob came from her throat.

Drawing her to him firmly, Maximilian breathed into her ear. His voice, suavely sweet, sent tingling vibrations through her.

"Mary! Mary! Thou the daughter of a slave! Child, thou art adorable! Tell me, how is it I have never seen thee? How long hast thou been here? Where hast thy father hid thee?"

The girl, finding voice, pleaded incoherently. Shaking with sobs, she hysterically begged him to let her go.

"Nay, sweet, sweet Mary!" Maximilian playfully shook his head. "Now thou hast come unto me, thou shalt stay by me. It is not well that I should be alone! But tell me—tell me—where hath thy father hidden thee?"

In a shaking voice she told him of her father—of the mother who had just died. She besought him to release her.

"Fear me not," he whispered, and his voice was warm upon her ear. "I shall be gentle with thee! For thou art fair, sweet maid. Thy face is as the silver moon! And thou hast been here among the slaves! Thou hast been here among them and I have spent sterile hours, indulging in empty dreams! Hast not thou, too, loveliest of maidens, pined as I for sweet companionship? Hast thou companions, a friend? By all the gods, thou art fairer than Phryne! Seek not to go from me!"

She hid her face. She knew not why.

"I have travelled far in remote countries of the world, Mary! Always was I restless! Never knew I perfect peace! My soul hungered for that whereof my heart was ignorant! Fool! Knowing not that, as the fawn panteth for water, my ignorant heart thirsted for thee. Ah, I have known many women—and strange loves. Yet none requited me." He smiled wearily. "Each morning in the desert, my Mary, there come across the burning spaces in long procession the wild beasts of the jungle—lions with their young, elephants, giraffes with spotted necks, delicate-limbed gazelles, cheetahs with soft coats—travelling for many leagues, they come unto the drinking-places where rivers have once been, and there of the water they drink their fill. I have seen them thus. It is verily a marvellous spectacle. Ah, Mary, fool that I have been! For I was less keen than they in seeking the spring whereat I might quench the thirst of my heart! For here where I was a child was that for which I yearned, the beauty I sought elsewhere in vain, the face I sought among women through all the world! Thou, thou, incomparable one, wert here!"

With one hand beneath her chin, Maximilian gently but forcibly compelled Mary to lift up her face. Bereft of strength to resist, grown suddenly faint, Mary let her head fall back pas-

sively on his shoulder, closing her eyes. Ravished by her beauty, the boy impassionedly pressed his face to hers, caressingly rubbing his beardless cheeks against her own.

"Fairest of the Graces! How I love thee! Thy throat is as the breast of doves!" Maximilian breathed rapturously. "Thy breath hath the odor of calamus and myrrh! Mary! Mary! The stars travailed, the seas labored, the winds whipped rains upon the earth that thou shouldst as Aphrodite be born unto life! Thou art made of sea-mist and the fire of stars! The beryl color of the sea is in thine eyes. Oh gods, oh Aphrodite"—he panted, drawing for a moment away—"the fruits of the earth ripen in thy mouth!"

Mary felt the boy's moist lips upon her face. They lingered long and warmly upon her closed eyes. An inordinate wild fear fluttered like a winged thing within her bosom. With a quavering moan she turned her head and struggled instinctively to release herself. But Maximilian held her close, his arm gripping her waist in a secure embrace. Under his kisses Mary's pulses began deliriously to throb; the chill fear in her heart vanished in a disseminating glow. Still she instinctively, but vainly, struggled, uttering low plaints.

"Thy mouth . . . thy mouth!" Devourously the youth kissed her hair, the little ears that nestled in its meshes. It seemed to Mary that the earth departed from beneath her feet; her ears rang with the sound of drumming lyres. The boy's breath was torrid upon her cheeks.

"Oh Mary, Mary, that I might eat thy lips as fruit! That I might drink thy blood as wine until thy veins were famished! That I might annihilate and absorb thee into myself! Gods! that Vulcan might forge us into one! That thy bones as metal molten might be fused into my bones! That thy flesh might melt as wax and merge into the flesh of me, that thy blood might be mingled with my blood! That thy breath might fill my lungs! That under my tongue might distil the nectar of thy mouth!"

Maximilian's arm closed tightly about her—Mary felt her breath leave her lungs. Her little breasts ached. His prolonged kisses stung her neck like the biting smart of whips. As in a delirium Mary heard the cooing of the doves in the

eaves, the irrepressible laughter of the gladsomely wanton fountains. Her veins seemed saturated with the white moon-mists creeping over the grasses. Her nostrils in-breathed the odor of the aloe trees, of orange blossoms, the earth-aroma of germinating nature.

"Thy mouth—thy . . . mouth."

Roughly, fiercely impatient, Maximilian seized her cheeks between the palms of his two hands and forced her face around unto his face. Mary felt his arms shaking, his limbs quaking against her own.

"Mary!—Mary!" he gasped, eager, panting, "give—unto—me—thy—mouth . . ."

A swooning transport relaxed the girl's rigid limbs. Within her breasts dissolved the dripping sweetness of milk and the honeycomb. With a shuddering sigh, surrenderingly, she gave her mouth unto him.

Above them an acacia tree, pendulous with golden bloom, exhaled a voluptuous fragrance. Tremulantly, softly caressive, an amorous breeze from the sea flutteringly wafted across the gardens the blown petals of unvirgined flowers. In the nesting recesses of the palace architraves the doves, with swelling bosoms, cooed delightedly. Far away in an inner courtyard a bulbul, with leaping, mounting clarion trills, began deliciously to sing.

## II

OTHER nights of wonder followed. Nights when the magical moon invested world and sky with a silvery enchantment, dimming the stars and whitely firing the distant sea; when, phantom-wise, milky hazes were conjured from the grasses, and the doves cooed delightedly and nightingales made the night dilate with melodic nuptials. There were vivid nights of stars, multi-colored, throbbing like pendant gems in the liquid turquoise heavens; when shadows, gathering substance, glided surreptitiously into the deeper garden glades, and the fountains babbled confidences concerning mysterious liaisons in the verdurous retreats. There were nights of lowering clouds when storms threatened, when the leaves of the trees lisped troublously and all nature furtively stirred, expectant, fearful. Then the gardens crept with incorporeal presences, palpable, prowling—the uneasy concupiscence of a tropical incessantly germinating vegetation. The air was moist as kisses, and, shaken in a saturnalia of capricious winds, eldritch nocturnal flowers distilled and saturated the atmosphere with inebriating essences. Thus while Luke, the slave, attended prayers, Mary and Maximilian spent enraptured hours together.

As a child Mary had never played with the girls of the slave-quarters; she had found no interest in their sewing, their mimic play with dolls, their games. Always she seemed apart, not of their kind, lonely, aloof, oppressed by some unformulated prenatal alien sadness. A curious unrest had always beset her; she was given to moods of deep melancholy, and often, at night, for no reason, wept herself to sleep. But now life and the world were changed; she no longer went with her father to the Gate of the Moon slyly to ogle the old men and taunt the half-grown boys; the boys there were of no interest to her. She moved, with head aloft, inspired by a secret cherished pride, among the slave girls. During these days Mary's childhood unfolded as a flower unfolds; her step became resilient, she walked buoyantly; her sea-green eyes glowed betimes with

a golden-shot turquoise lustre; her body swelled gloriously with a mature ripening. With blithesome songs on her lips she performed the monotonous round of household tasks for her father. For she dreamed of Maximilian even as her fingers dexterously wove fabrics of Miletian wool.

Mary and Maximilian never met by day. Realizing her father possessed the bitter prejudices of the Christians, Mary agreed with Maximilian that it would be unwise for him to learn of their companionship. There was something stirring in the very secrecy of their love.

By night, after her father had gone, Mary would steal from her chamber and meet Maximilian. It was then she entered a translated existence more wondrous than that of dreams; that she felt her spirit dissolving into the silver moonlight and seemed to drink of all the fabulous sweet waters of the world beneath the boy's lips. Maximilian recited to Mary the verses of Anacreon and Theocritus. He thrilled the girl with accounts of the cities he had visited, of the curious sights of the world. He told her of the great events of the empire, of the campaigns of Valentinian I, of the menace of the Goths, and of the court of the Emperor Gratian. He decided to grant to Mary's father his freedom, and then, lest, by reason of his intolerant religious fanaticism, he interfere with their happiness, they would go on a long journey to the cities of Achaia, Italy, and Thracia. They playfully planned an idyllic voyage in a gilded trireme on the Euxine Sea. They might even go up the Danube, where the Germanic tribes were waging war.

Of that which had come into her life Mary had no adequate understanding. By instinct she knew, however, she dare not tell that fearsome man her father. All she realized was that there was an uncomprehended transport in Maximilian's arms; that during brief absences she craved him with an apprehensive yearning and was filled with vague premonitions and a worried anxiety; that, when they met, with boundless relief, she experienced something leap up as a fountain within her and overflow out of her body through lips and finger-tips. It was all strange, and new, and very wonderful!

One day Maximilian went on a journey into the desert to practise his skill at archery. He took many slaves with him. Late in the afternoon, several days thereafter, amid great perturbation, giving vent to excessive lamentations, the slaves returned. Mary heard their excited voices in an outer courtyard. They spoke incoherently to the head slave-master. Mary listened to what they said—then the world grew horribly black. What was it? **Maximilian was dead!** . . .

The youth had been attacked by a lion and had been almost instantly killed. Before the eyes of his panic-stricken, gibbering slaves his slim youth's body had been hideously mangled by the savage beast.

The child Mary, as she listened, suddenly visioned the mighty creature, enraged with hunger, spring unseen from the treacherous concealment, sink its sharp slicing claws into the yielding soft flesh, and, ere Maximilian could utter a cry, fasten its drooling jaws into his slim white neck. . . . She could see, also, the ghastly ribs beneath which a heart had joyously pounded, already dried and bleached in the hot African sun. . . . That same instant, with a smiting simultaneousness, in a circumambient flood of soft moonbeams, she imaged Maximilian leap over the portico parapet, his tender face alight, felt him seize her in his arms, take her face between the palms of his hands and force it upward to his own; felt her mouth melt in the ardor of his kiss. And yet in that very instant she knew that would be no more. . . . *Maximilian was dead.* Dead—dead! Something smotheringly choked in her throat; within her bosom seemed savagely to tear the rasping claws of some rapacious monster. *Maximilian was dead!* That night she would steal, as was her wont, into the great gardens. There would be a full moon. The odor of acacias, of the redolent citron trees, the earth-aroma of germinating nature, would permeate the air. The white hazes would waft up from the grass and sift into her pulses. The doves in the eaves, their bosoms swelling, would coo delightedly. A bulbul would sing. Thus it would be night after night, but Maximilian would come no more! Thus it would be, in the years to follow. But Maximilian would come no more. *Maximilian was dead!* That—and only that—sobbed its meaning into the heart of Mary.

Staggering away, she groped her passage through the slaves' quarters as though smitten blind. She wanted to scream. But her voice was dumb.

When she reached her chamber she threw herself upon her mattress, voiceless, and gazed blankly at the ceiling like a mad thing. Mary was still in years a child. But she had loved—loved as it was given her genuine child-woman's heart to love. And now all she loved, all that was dear in her starved life, was taken away! Her throat swelled; her heart pounded like a hammer in her breast. She could feel the hot blood poisoning her pulses. Still she could not weep. Maximilian was dead. And yet almost audibly now—with ghastly mockery—she could hear his words of love breathed into her ears. "Thy mouth, Mary . . . give unto me thy mouth." She gnawed at her fists and wrenched at the hair of her head. But she felt no sensation; she seemed numbed. Maximilian was dead—dead! In that awful dumb hour she tried to bring herself to realize that he would no longer sit with her beneath the goldenly blooming acacia trees, no longer whisper into her ears, no longer take her face between the warm palms of his hands. . . . But why? What was death? Why was death? Its unyielding mystery, its hostile horror, its incredibly sudden annihilation of all that is beloved in life, confronted her.

Alas! poor little child Mary, thou who wert destined to endure and to suffer so much, to give thy lips to shame and thy body to ignominies, ere life and love in their divine meaning were to be revealed unto thee, thus love and its inevitable companion death, in their beauty and desolating bitterness, in thy childhood came to thee! Ah, child, thine was only the heartache of too many love-lorn and lonely in the world throughout the centuries. Poor little Mary, thou who wert destined to learn of all love and of woman's uttermost degradation, in this thy early bereavement—even as later when thou should seek the dark highways—there was none to comfort thee!

For an hour Mary lay dumbly aching—then it seemed a mighty hand smote her. She became unconscious. Thus her father, when he went to summon her to prepare his evening



meal, found her. Her eyes were red and swollen; but the father, dwelling upon the archbishop's recent fulmination against the Arians, saw not, and of the love and its loss in the child's heart guessed not. On the evening of that same day it was made known that by the dead lord's order, given just before he went to his death, Luke the slave was granted his freedom. A few days later, distraught with suppressed grief, Mary was led from the slave-quarters, from the demesne of the enchanted gardens, and through the streets, to an humble house in a section of the city inhabited by Christians.

With his freedom Luke had been given a generous bounty. The amount amazed him. He attributed no credit to the generosity and good-heartedness of the dead master. To Luke, Maximilian had been simply an involuntient instrument of the Divine Will. Luke's freedom and the purse of gold had unquestionably come as a reward for his service to the Lord, who had, he knew, power to move the hearts of the most wicked. In the company of others of his brethren, with whom he broke bread and to whom, in celebration of his freedom, he gave a repast of oysters and resinous wine, he thanked the risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.

At first Mary had a desire to flee from the midst of the serious companions of her father. Their long faces, their solemn voices raised in perpetual admonition, oppressed her. Sometimes they came and pleaded with her to accept salvation, to go through the rite of holy baptism, but with timid excuses she put them off. The remembrance of that reeking underground chamber, where she had been some five years before, filled her with dread.

For many days Mary moved mechanically about her simple tasks. She went through that period when she could not believe that the one she loved no longer lived. It all seemed an evil nightmare. It seemed that, had she gone back to the gardens, she must find Maximilian there. For weeks she lived in a dull torpor. Something within her seemed to have died. She remembered the nights in the englamoured gardens—they, too, were dream-like, unreal, as if they had never, never been.

Yet in her dreams at night Mary curiously found herself

lying in Maximilian's arms, found his breath warm upon her face, his lips devouringly pressed upon her mouth. Then she would wake with a sharp, pained cry and reach out in desperation to grasp him in the darkness. Then, folding in her arms only the unyielding vacancy of the dark, the devastation of her loss smote her. Alone, all alone, she would weep piteously throughout the night until, hearing the firm step of her father approaching in the streets, she would bravely stifle the sobs in her throat and thus lie awake, aching, dumb, wild-eyed, staring through the window until the eastern sky ruddied with the inexorably returning dawn.

Before that fierce man her father Mary cringed like a cowed animal. Luke spoke little to the shrinking girl—indeed, he was seldom at home. Alexandria, at this time, besides being the battle-ground of the final struggle between paganism and Christianity, was also the arena of many internecine Christian conflicts and heresies—including numerous sects of Gnostics who quibbled over abstruse subtleties of philosophy; Montanists who surpassed the monks in the furious rigor of their penances, tearing out their nails, teeth, hair, and eyes and revoltingly disfiguring their bodies; Novatians who denied the efficacy of repentance and among themselves bitterly disagreed as to the date for the celebration of Easter; Eunomians who questioned the omniscience of God and who, instead of baptizing with three immersions in the name of the Trinity as did the orthodox, baptized with one immersion in the name of Christ, and Manichæans, whose religion mingled the Oriental philosophy of Persia with Christian theology. There were heresies within heresies, apostasies among the apostates, dissensions among the dissenters. Religion, rife with discord, was the very denial of brotherly love and peace among men. Violent and bitter quarrels ensued even among the orthodox over speculations concerning the nature of God, some factions maintaining He had a corporeal presence with a body, hands, feet, hair, and nails, others maintaining, after Origen, that His essence was purely spiritual. Bloody fights marked controversies over the mystery of the Trinity. The city was, moreover, the very centre of Arianism, a powerful schism which denied Godhood to Jesus Christ. The disciples

of Arius—a jackal of hell, abhorred by the Christians above all other apostates—were carrying on their pernicious teachings and gaining converts. They were more violently hated by the Christians than the Jews and the Pagans themselves. And with that fanatic hatred, that flaming zeal, that merciless intolerance which has singularly marked the conflicts of Christianity throughout history, the Christians, determining to rid the world of such iniquitous pests, often fell upon the dwellings of the heretics by night. Sometimes bands of monks, coming into the city from the desert by nightfall, led the attacks. They wore sheepskins and carried pikes and maces; their eyes burned with a murderous mania; they sang hymns. Through the dark streets they would bear down upon the obscure quarters of the Arians, beat in the doors, and with torches fire the houses. And, with voices upraised in a swelling demoniac chorus, as though they had become suddenly obsessed by the demons who tormented them in their desert retreats, the long-bearded monks assaulted their enemies with clubs, smashing their skulls, and hacked them with swords. Many of the victims, out of utter hatred, were disembowelled. These zealots paused not for breath, for thus they were saving, so they believed, innumerable souls from falling into the snares of the hated schism and going to hell.

In these outrages Luke led with unexampled zeal. His great arms swung the pike right and left. Only when the flames of the burning buildings and the cries of the combat attracted the guards did Luke and his fellows desist. Then, satiated, exalted, they would slink silently through the streets. Her child-soul revolted, Mary often washed blood-stains from her father's garments; whatever she suspected, she never dared question him. But she feared him all the more.

In their turn the Christians were often persecuted by the pagans, and sometimes attacked by the Jews. But the greater the persecutions, the more contagiously did the fire of zeal spread among them. Luke felt the fiery tongues. A slave, ignorant, brutal, blind and unseeing to the spiritual message of Christianity, Luke was fired only with its superstitions, prejudices and hatreds. From his class and kind, at the time, were most converts recruited. Luke went among the

market-places and slave-quarters of the big estates, exhorting the bondmen of the city to join the religion of the lowly.

One day Mary crouched, every fibre of her child's body aching with a dull agony, in her chamber, when she heard her father calling her. She went down to the court. It was a day of fasting, and Luke had brought home several meagre fish. As he gave the slimy creatures to the girl, his eyes suddenly, terribly, suspiciously glared; his heavy brows beetled in a frightful scowl; his mouth, grotesquely slit across his cheek, opened ominously and his teeth gleamed. Raising his gnarled arm, in an infuriated voice, he thundered:

"*What hast thou been? Thou spawn of hell, tell me—what hast thou been?*"

Mary did not understand. She retreated to the wall, quaking under the fury of the man's blazing gaze.

"*Speak to me, thou wanton, or I will beat thee! I will slay thee as the Holy Word commands. Speak to me, thou snivelling bait of Satan, what hast thou been? Thou hast brought shame into a Christian home! Thou hast brought me into contempt. Woe unto me! Verily thou art the fit fruit of thy mother! As a babe thou wert destined for infamy! Come hither, thou abomination! Thou child of Babylon, come hither!*"

Trembling, Mary, like a dog, whined at the big man's feet.

"*Who was he? Who betrayed thee?*" He shook his huge fist over the girl.

Mary gazed upwards piteously. She looked aghast into her father's face—then, by instinct, she understood. He knew! They were necromancers, these Christians! They dealt in sorcery—so the slaves had once told her, with fear and awe. Now she understood. In some way, by the clairvoyant powers of those who worshipped in the tombs, he had learned of the silver nights, of the love-nights that would be no more.

"*Speak to me! Art thou dumb? Who was he? Who debauched thee? Tell me——*"

Her hands crept up his garments imploringly.

"*What dost thou mean? Father! Father!*" she wailed.

He seized her wrist and twisted it sharply. Mary uttered a pained scream.

"Lie not to me, thou sink of impurity!" He seized her hair and twisted it about his hand, and as the girl writhed beneath him he literally lifted her from the ground. "Tell me—to whom didst thou give thyself?"

"'Twas Maximilian, father . . . father, I—I loved him!"

He tore her hair and buffeted her face with his fist.

"Thou loved him! Thou hast defiled my house! Thou hast given thyself to uncleanness! Thou hast brought me into reproach! Maximilian—a worshipper of false gods! Profligate unbeliever! Accursed infidel!"

"He loved me, oh, father, father . . ." She wept as she pleaded pathetically. "We did no harm. He was kind to me. He taught me of love, father, and love is beautiful. Methinks, father, thou dost not know of love. . . . For if thou hadst felt what my heart has felt . . . in the gardens, father . . . thou couldst not have spat upon my mother's face ere they took her to the tomb . . ."

"Daughter of Gehenna, speak not thus to me!"

He hurled her to the ground.

Thereupon the big man seized a scourge—a whip with long leather lashes pronged with sharp bits of metal. There was a low, terrified cry, the hissing sound of a whip slickerishly wrapping itself about human flesh . . . a child's long-drawn, quavering moans. Then utter silence . . . and the heavy stride of a man leaving the hut.

Believing that he had fulfilled the duties incumbent upon a father after the old-law injunctions that the wilful child should be flogged and the adulteress stoned, the freedman went to the meeting-place of the Christians, where he openly confessed that his daughter had brought iniquity into his house. With the others, he spent the night in prayer.

The next day, amid pious execrations, Mary was stoned from the street in which her father lived.

Mary never thereafter forgot the ugly crowd of men, women, and children gathered without her father's house; the hateful spectacle of the morbidly curious and sneering faces, the hard-gloating scrutiny of merciless, unpitying eyes. She

never forgot her father's repudiation as he drove her from her home, nor the jeering chorus of stinging taunts that greeted her as she cringed fearfully along the street. For years there rang in her ears the scathing cries of reproach and contemptuous mockery, the fulsomely pious opprobrium of solemn, sanctimonious voices. Her cheeks burned for the unbearable shame of it. She never forgot, child that she was, the glad eagerness with which they picked up stones to cast at her, and especially the gleeful malignance of the little Christian children.

For days her body was sore from the cruel cuts and bruises. Only thereafter and by degrees the full agony, the shame, the injustice of it all came back to her. She remembered running, the blood streaming over her body, through the crowd. They buffeted her to and fro. They struck her. Some laughed. Never could she forget that laughter. She ran and ran, and finally the miserable chorus died away, and she found herself tearing along aimlessly amid the human stream that surged along the great esplanade toward the Gate of the Moon. Still a child in years, she found herself, a prey to all the vices of the world, upon the streets of Alexandria.

She did not know whither to go; she knew no one of whom she might beg shelter. So all that day she moved with the crowds mechanically from the Gate of the Moon, across the vast three-mile esplanade, to the Gate of the Sun, back and forth. About her roared a babel of sound, the trumpetings of elephants bearing palanquins and bales of merchandise; the shrill whinnying of camels; the cries of runners preceding the litters of the rich; the calls of negroes selling fruits and caged birds; the hypnotic murmur of thousands of human beings conversing as they passed. About her undulated a swiftly-moving river of humanity—Romans in richly purple-bordered togas; men and boys carrying gaudy parasols; ladies of wealth promenading; Arabs from the desert in gaudy burnous and gleaming white turbans; Nubian slaves, wearing only loin cloths, their bodies gleaming black under oil; Numidian, Sarmatian, Carthaginian, Ephesian, and Scythian prostitutes; sailors of all nationalities; little girls with saucy, piquant faces selling flowers and perfumes; flute-players and singers, and street boys bent on thievery and mischief.

She wandered blindly. She feared even to stop and rest lest her father's co-religionists find her.

Late in the evening she paused in the shadow of one of the great rose obelisks before the Cæsareum. She became aware of a fierce-looking man staring hard at her; the expression in his eyes filled her with apprehension. Panic-stricken, fearing him to be a Christian, she fled into the dusk.

Night fell; the crowds on the jetty had dispersed. On the esplanade the procession of elephants, camels, and asses had thinned. Mary paced the street, dazedly watching the line of palanquins and gilded curricles—the wealthy of the city wending their way to banquets and entertainments. Once a young man, his head garlanded with flowers, beckoned Mary from between the silken curtains of a litter. Late at night, unable to move farther, she sought shelter in the doorway of a mansion in the higher quarter of the city. Mary crouched, trembling like a scared dog, hidden in the shadows. Dreamily she heard the cry of a watchman, and saw the distant gleam of the signal light on the summit of the Pharos tower. Finally she slept. She dreamed she was wandering in the gardens of her childhood home; that she was waiting for some one—whom, in her dream, she did not know—beneath the fragrant acacia and citron trees.

The owner of the mansion, an old man, returning home late, discovered Mary. Opening the door, he summoned slaves. A light was brought. Slaves carried Mary to a perfumed bath, anointed her cuts and bruises, and rubbed her delicate body with oils and perfumes. She was then led to the chamber of their master. Mary was given food to eat, and wine. She took but a sip of the wine—it sickened her.

Just before morning, Mary stealthily crept through the dark halls of the mansion from the old man's chamber. She left him breathing heavily in the stupor of wine. Reaching the courtyard, Mary softly tiptoed across the mosaic floor, her heart beating fearfully lest she be pursued. Her face was whiter than ashes; her child's outraged body was fevered with shame. Arriving at the door of the outer vestibule, with extreme caution she drew the bolt. In the courtyard a parrot, aroused from its slumber, screamed. Affrighted, Mary sprang

into the street, flung the door shut, and fled down the vacant thoroughfare as fast as her feet would carry her. In her bosom, clutching it fiercely, she had the old man's purse, fat with gold.

For several days she wandered about, sleeping by night in the shelter of timber and wheat stacked along the quays. The stolen bag of money oppressed her; she was afraid to spend it. She purchased only meagre bits of food, for fear lest her theft be suspected. Whenever any one gazed hard at her she shrank away in apprehension. One day, along the quay, she fell in with a group of gamins. They were rascally young pickpockets and juvenile outlaws who haunted the wharves. Their rough human companionship was grateful to the lonely heart of Mary; she went about with them that day, joined childlike in their pranks and mischief, and went to their shelter at night. They took the purse of gold away from her.

Half dead from hunger and exhaustion, Mary fainted one night as she was passing the theatre.

A vast concourse of people was assembled without. Just at this time there emerged, amid a coterie of admirers, the favorite dancer and pantomimist of the day, who had concluded a brilliant performance. As she appeared under the blazing lamps of the entrance a swelling salvo of applause went up. Mary suddenly felt the crowd reel about her; then the faces vanished, the cheers died. She fell prostrate right at the feet of the dancer. She would have been trampled upon, but the popular favorite uttered a cry and raised her arm, warding the crowd back. Stooping, she lifted the unconscious girl in her arms and summoned her palanquin. When the mob perceived what their favorite had done, ringing acclamations rent the air; flowers were showered upon her. The actress's slaves supported Mary to the litter, and she was taken to a luxuriously appointed villa in Rhacotis.

It was only when they arrived at the villa and entered the brilliantly lighted atrium that Mary observed her benefactress. She saw an opulent, handsome woman, with a full, pleasant face, robed in a crimson garment hemmed with peacock plumes. In her hair, elaborately piled into a pyramid on her head, were



strings of emeralds. The woman's face was painted, her eyelids blackened, her finger-nails tinted.

Slaves waited upon Mary. Food was brought to her—she drank wine. This time it did not sicken, but exhilarated, her. It seemed that a paradise had opened before her. Her benefactress was kind; she spoke softly, with an endearing tenderness to Mary, soothed her hands, gently caressed her face. When Mary gratefully returned with a timid hand-clasp such tenderness as her own mother had never shown, the woman lingeringly kissed her. Mary remained with her.

This was a period of revelation for Mary. Men, young and old, came to see the mistress of the villa. They brought rich gifts and left much gold. Mary wondered at the extreme youth as well as the extreme age of most of those who came. Sometimes the visitors, seeing her by chance, tried to engage Mary in conversation. This always precipitated her mistress into a furious rage. She effectually succeeded, however, in protecting Mary from her guests.

At this time Mary's child was born. Because of her father's inhuman beating, it died at birth.

Mary confided to the courtesan her girlhood love, her father's cruelty, and told how she was stoned from the street of the Christians. The woman replied that she despised all men, that they should be loved only for what they gave, that all were beasts. Mary remembered those words long after.

Mary marvelled concerning the lavish generosity and affection of her mistress. She learned many things at this time. She learned the secret wiles and trickeries of her sex—of the arts of enhancing beauty, the magical effects of tints that stain the cheeks and lips and deepen the eyes. She became acquainted with the insidious effects of perfumes—that aphrodisiacal chemistry of the heart of flowers which allays or violently excites passion.

Mary watched her mistress at her toilet, wondering, fascinated, delighted. She never forgot the novel thrill she experienced when she first heightened the roses of her cheeks, made her eyes large, heavy, and slumbrous with antimony, crayons, and blue powder, and with a vivid redness endowed her lips with a more enticing allure. With childish playful-

ness, holding her mistress's mirror before her, she variously and strikingly altered her appearance by the use of cosmetics and by rearranging her hair.

Thus she delighted in herself, and for the first time perceived the sensual appeal of her own beauty. Natively keen, Mary observed the effects upon men of bodily adornment—of the contrasts of color in dress, of the covert tantalization in the concealment of robes or the half revelation of veils, in the chance betrayal of a bared breast or ankle. She grasped that key of feminine power which lies in the artful play of expression, the languor or vivacity of gestures, the provocative coquetry of the lips, the infinite blandishments in the teasing play and rolling of the eyes.

One night, panic-stricken, quailing with self-abasement, with cold revulsion from the unthought-of, uncomprehended horror that had crept upon her in the dark, the monstrousness under whose vampire caresses she awoke, aghast, Mary fled from the villa. And although she left, never to return, she took none of the money of her benefactress with her.

### III

MARY went upon the streets.

They were miserable companions in whose sordid quarters she took her abode—pale, piteous vulture-girls of the centuries, frailly tragic, who have ever sorrowfully solicited down the long way of the world's years, who, preying upon men, have themselves more hideously been preyed upon. These girls were cynical with mean experiences and hardened in the pecuniary traffic of vice—low, depraved, and vulgar, yet among themselves not without a strange pathetic kindness of their own. With these slinking wraiths of the Alexandrian streets Mary mingled, and, a child in years, plied a trade as old as the race. To this life, with an inert listlessness, a numbness born of terror and despair, the girl gave herself—and, at least, she did not starve.

Of that age-old tragedy of woman's sex-exploitation in which she began to play her part, the beautiful child had no comprehension. For most of those with whom she first commenced Mary felt an intolerable aversion. Yet more corrosive in its blight was the memory of her father, his withering words, the bitter, hateful faces of his companions as they stoned her from her home. So, needing food, filled with the omnipresent human-fear of starvation, and knowing she could never go back to her father's house or mingle with those who had scathed her, the child would close her eyes—with great bravery—and forget the unutterable things of life in one sweet virgin memory—the memory of her girlhood's untainted love.

Each evening Alexandria gathered on the jetty. To watch the sunset over the Mediterranean came folk of every order and condition—patrician women, barefoot courtesans, officials, wealthy merchants, travellers from many lands, poets, philosophers, sculptors, flower-girls, flute-players, singers, sailors, beggars. Amid the crowd Mary wandered, sometimes alone, more often with poor courtesans. Their audacity amazed her. None who saw ever forgot Mary's wistful, peering, scared child-face—a face gleaming amid the tangled jungle of human ugly-

ness on the promenade like a waxen lily, immaculately white.

From the first Mary observed that her companions ogled richly-dressed young men whose purses jingled with coins, and often sought to make assignations with them. Later in the night, when the Heptastadium was deserted, she saw them hail silken-curtained palanquins on the esplanade. When, later, they met Mary in the low inns near the market quarter of Rhacotis, which they frequented, they sometimes flaunted fat purses and not seldom displayed bracelets, brooches, and rings which they had stolen.

Mary's life was one of appalling contrasts—of brief days of riotous prosperity and more prolonged periods of sordid, demeaning poverty. Her child's soul was seared with the shame and self-humiliation of it—the withering recoil of a virginal thing from a gross, promiscuous mingling in which there was no transfiguring element of idealized romance, or the exaltation of passion. Repulsion, self-loathing, and hatred greened her brain; she was sometimes filled with murderous impulses, fits of violent, resentful hysteria. A sullen, morbid antagonism for days dominated her. Learning from those more experienced, she began to steal whenever she could. Theft, with its petty element of revenge, consoled her. She deliberately hardened a conscience natively sensitive and honest and stole unscrupulously.

In the society of others of her kind she soon became actuated with the rivalry of her drab competitors, spurred by their jealousies, interested in their small gossip. Younger than they, and incomparably more beautiful, Mary soon found herself a bitterly-hated rival, the victim of much envious spite. Then she found joy in displaying a childish disdain among them, a pitiful amusement in purveying her charms, and by audacious coquetry in winning from others their transient admirers. Mary applied the arts she had learned in the villa of the people's favorite dancer. She was unique for a teasing, exasperating coquetry, mischievous badinage, a wantonness in the disquieting exhibition and allurements of her beauty. She became noted in the cheaper resorts of the city, and it was not long before an aged courtesan, who owned many dives and trafficked in girls, heard of Mary and sought her out.

She met Mary one night as she sat nibbling myxare confections in an immense hall with a company of sailors. In the amphitheatre were several hundred men, laborers, sailors, slaves, and swarms of homeless prostitutes, many barefooted and clothed in rags. Some, in their arms, carried wretched babies. They sat at tables, eating lentils, oysters, olyra bread, and drinking resinous wine and beer, watching, meanwhile, dancers and acrobats engaged in vulgar performances on a platform in the rear to the clangor of a bronze systum.

"Come with me, thou fool-fledgling! Chit, dost thou not know thou art wasting time amid such low wastrels!" whispered the old hag, winking shrewdly. "By the beauties of Orchomenus, whence didst thou come? Didst thou spring from the sea? There is no girl in Alexandria with thy complexion, thy skin, thine eyes"—she drew away admiringly. "By the gods, thine eyes! Thou art destined, unless my wits deceive me, for fame and money—money! Ah, money!" She chucked Mary's chin playfully. "Dearie, I shall make thee rich!"

She evoked before Mary, in her cracked, piping voice, the splendors of banquet scenes and revels in which she might engage. She recounted the opportunities of winning wealthy admirers among the aristocracy, of the possibilities of securing wealth—unlimited wealth—by means of her unusual youth and charms. As she sat at the table scowling at the sailors, sucking the air through her yellow teeth, she stirred in Mary's heart the first seeds of ambition, the first desire of conquest. Through the dark obscurity of her mean life Mary saw a vision of herself, irradiant, at the banquet tables of the rich, sought-after, desired, the idol of enslaved, enamoured men. Mary had heard from her companions of the fabulous wealth of certain noted women. She had watched the rich courtesans, clothed in muslin tissues, wearing jewels and dangling fans of osprey plumes, as they promenaded the jetty at sunset. Mary had felt admiration and a hopeless envy, but the possibility of such a future had not occurred to her. Her heart expanded.

"And they are young—or old and ugly, these men?" she asked eagerly.

The aged crone cackled with laughter.

"Aye, thou shalt meet the pride of Alexandria! Youths

fair as Adonis! And thou shalt pluck them as lotus blossoms, thou shalt crush them in thy little hands! But think not what I promise thee lieth with them." She whispered craftily in Mary's ear. "Among those to whom I shall send thee are the wealthiest men in the city—Aufugus, Arsenius the philosopher, and, let me see!" She marked them off on her scrawny fingers. "Three corn merchants rich as Croesus, two magistrates, Solomon Ben-Ezra! Rich—rich, but a Jew!" Her lips curled contemptuously. "Money-lender—but rich! He will like thee!" She mentioned the names of a number of men—names which Mary had hitherto heard with awe. "Aye, my little Phryne, 'tis not from the young thou shalt win wealth for us, but from the old! They are ever fond of the young." Her shoulders shook with senile laughter. "Ah, thou art a delectable child!" She gloated upon Mary—for in her dimpled body she saw precious material for profit.

She pinched Mary's arms and poked a long, scrawny finger into her breasts, grunting with satisfaction.

"Verily, 'tis not strange yon dried-out husks are consumed by jealousy of thee! I would have none of them. Nor do I wonder that this scum hath set upon thee, my flower, as flies!"

The sailors were uproariously calling for Mary. The old crone shook her fist defiantly.

"Wastrels! Offals of the earth! Thou art done with them!" She winked at Mary. Aye, she would teach Mary the dances that were most pleasing, most potent upon beholders; she would teach her how to allure, cajole, act pantomimes, and sing. Perhaps she might become a great pantomimist or comedienne! And win the affections of one of the wealthiest men in Alexandria! She might become a favorite at the theatre! Perhaps, some day, at the games, her appearance would be greeted with applause! Who knew?

Mary left the inn and took up her abode with the old hag.

By means of her traffic Mary's aged benefactress had become immensely rich. She was unstintedly generous to the girl. She devoted most of her attention to the newcomer, to the chagrin of her other *protégées*. These were mostly envious, mischievous vixens—shallow-brained but pretty creatures with

no particular charm save that of youthful comeliness. They spent their days with metal mirrors in their hands; some played with dolls. They gossiped and ate confections. The old crone in her heyday had been a powerful courtesan. A woman of wit and cunning, she detected in Mary a keen though immature mind—qualities of intuition, intellect, and imagination which, as she knew, forever and ever, combined with wantonness, self-possession, and beauty, play havoc with men. She taught Mary to read the papyrus. For this old woman, who made a business of vice, was a devoted disciple of Plato and Plotinus and gabbled the jargon of the Neo-Platonists. She found the joy of her reprobate old age in the poets. She spent her time in calculations concerning her dubious income and in speculations regarding the immortality of the soul. She sent Mary to classes in the Museum, selected books of philosophy, memoirs of courtesans, and treatises on the arts of love for her reading. Mary read the fables of Apuleius, the history of Herodotus, and the poems of Homer and Theocritus. It was a grotesque thing to hear the rapacious harpy expounding to her *protégée* Plato's arguments concerning love, the Polyhymnian and Uranian-divine, and interjecting into her philosophic discourse her views concerning men, which were wisely cynical and altogether contemptuous.

"Thou art made for a great future, my child," she would enthusiastically exclaim. "The gods gave intellect to men; to women, beauty. In rare women they combine the qualities of both. Such are born to rule if they but use the self-seeking creatures for their own ends. Thus were Helen, Theodora, friend of Socrates; Cleopatra, whose mind rather than her beauty, mark me, wove its spell over the proud Antony. Ever preserve thy mind apart and aloof from men. Study men's weaknesses, observe them closely, and be ever mistress of thyself. Men seek no more than the pleasures thy lips and embraces have to give. Even Plato despised the love of women. Verily the majority deserve to be despised! They are the vassals of their masters. It is ever their nature to be subjugated. They desire no more than men's admiration and what appeals to their vanity. Observe these inane chits thou seest about thee. Painting their faces, gabbling about their lovers!

What do they desire of life? What think they of the future? Of what lieth beyond? Bah! They are verily as the cat that seeketh its plate and pillow, laving itself and purring, with no thought of the morrow. But thou art otherwise. Thou hast intelligence. Acquaint thyself with philosophy. Use thy beauty, use thine eyes, use thy body—be mistress of them as the player plays upon the strings of the cythera—only that they may serve thee toward a higher purpose. Life is a ladder to climb. Men are the steps of that ladder. Mount upon their necks. Trample upon them. Yea, crush them to powder. Give thy heart to none. Aspasia gave counsel only to one. Forget this not—make the men that love thee suffer, torture them with suspicions, cajole them, tease them, mock them, delude them with lies, hold them ever in suspense, leave them ever uncertain concerning thy sentiments. Thou shalt hold them thus. Thou shalt become great among women!”

Mary avidly devoted herself to study, fashioned her mind after the teachings of the great. Inspired with the Platonic dream of spiritual evolution through earthly incarnations, Mary with bated eagerness sought to master all the esoteric arts of love, so that, as consummate mistress of ineffable pleasures, she might with experience attain freedom, position, and power. And for a woman, to whom men credited no intelligence and gave no place in the world of artistic, political, or philosophic accomplishment, as the old crone told her, power was to be obtained only through the exploitation of her beauty. The old woman taught Mary to sing and to act in pantomime. She taught Mary to dance.

An impulsive creature of joy, Mary's being thrilled to its own native music. There was a gladsome spontaneity in her feet. She improvised beguiling dances. She danced as none of her companions who had been in training for years, more than surpassing the expectations of her mistress. She became adept in pantomimes, portrayed the goddesses exquisitely.

Carried away by enthusiasm, the old reprobate to whom Mary was in truth to owe so much bought gorgeous robes for her. For the first time the girl experienced the thrill, the sheer feminine delight of possessing fabrics fine as spun foam, rainbow-colored, tissues of muslin and gold, and jewels. In



the arraying of her person Mary displayed prodigious genius. She triumphed in an infinite variation of the arts of artificially enhancing her beauty, in the skill of dressing her hair, adorning her person, in the application of perfumes, in the conjuring witchery of gestures, and, more than all, in the exasperating coquetry of her eyes.

In less than two months Mary had become a favorite among the dancing-girls in Alexandria. Men paid fabulous prices that she might grace their feasts. At these entertainments Mary performed delirious dances. She led in the mad whirls of the corybantes—bacchic saturnalias of movement, her eyes afire, every nerve, every muscle of her body electrically alive. Or she floated along, arrayed in diaphanous veils, through the slow and undulant dances of the Greeks. She played with invisible balls in the air, tossed imaginary flowers, depicted the coming and rapture of spring. She danced with the fauns, leaped in Pan's glad revels, fled before a pursuing lover, was at once tantalizing and archly refusing. She enacted the classic pantomimes—the flight of Daphne, and Aphrodite struggling in the net wherein she was entrapped with Mars.

Her face mirrored the emotions of the characters she depicted. She spellbound her audiences. While she acted they held their breath. After the dances, after the pantomimes, flushed with excitement, old and young drank hilarious toasts to Mary, pelted her with flowers and purses. She moved about the tables, laughing, teasing, cajoling, coaxing gifts from the guests. Naught she asked was ever refused. Sometimes she sang. Her voice, as yet not fully developed, possessed a peculiarly exquisite timbre like to the disquieting tremor of disturbed lyre-strings.

Mary would return to her dwelling, her fingers covered with rings, her wrists strung with bags of money given to her as if they were toys. The jewels Mary kept; the money her pleased mistress greedily took away from her.

Mary entered into this life with a keen appreciation of all its thrilling excitements. Vitally alive with the pride of her sex and a sense of its power, in her existence she found all the zest of some breathlessly fascinating game. Men were pawns. She regarded them almost impersonally as creatures to taunt,

tempt, excite, play upon, and profit by. Deliberately she applied her arts, alertly watching the effect of her blandishments. She delighted inordinately in teasing men, in drawing them after her through the banquet halls, with coy half-promises on her lips and in her eyes, and then often in coldly repelling them with an insolent, exasperatingly supercilious disdain. She exulted in men's discomfiture and was amused by their perplexity. She was utterly abandoned in her engaging coqueties. Whereas in the early days, amid sordid surroundings, her soul had revolted at the life into which she was plunged, she now found magically cast all about it the glamour of luxury and wealth.

Poets wrote verses to her. Each morning brought her gifts of flowers. Nevertheless, heeding what her mistress told her, from all did she reserve herself mentally apart. Deliberately she hardened and calloused her finer sensibilities. But then, and during all the years that were to follow, she never entirely was able to overcome a cold, recoiling aversion from senile debauchees—those old men, deviated by age and experience yet who ever seek youth, whose heads were bald and whose grimacing faces, either apoplectic or sallow and withered, leered loathsomely when they meant to smile. They, however, rewarded her with liberal gifts—put bands of jewels about her arms, rings upon her fingers, and gave her purses opulent with gold. As the old crone had said, the purses of the young were meagre, their gifts scant. Because she was pleasure-loving and deliciously a woman, Mary did not deny herself the kisses of those who pleased her—from among the fairest youth of Alexandria she selected servitors as flowers, and as flowers ruthlessly flung them away. And yet, despite the excitement of her life, her hours of engrossing study, her inspiring ambitions, and the thrilling realization of her power, Mary, in the deeper depths of her nature, suffered from an incurable, desolating melancholy of the spirit, a thing that had oppressed her as a child, that, she felt, bore back into former lives, to other ages—a devastating sense of isolation in all the world, a craving of the soul for some uncomprehended completeness in a lonely, inexorably unyielding universe. Briefly, as a child, she had known surcease from this desolation, and she never

ceased to regret Maximilian. That memory possessed the charm of a first experience which nothing can duplicate. Yea, although she exercised the wiles of her sex and personality, Mary never found satisfying happiness. In her heart the serpent of pleasure, to whose hunger she abandoned herself, distilled its poison. In her veins, as days evolved from dazed, delirious nights, burned an ever-unassuaged fever. In her hours of greatest exaltation a cold hand crept upon her heart; in her moments of supreme transport a sense of loss, of inadequacy, of undefined regret smote her. For two years she was torn between hostile aversions and insatiate yearnings. The kisses of those she loved most left her unsated; for none who loved her gave that strange, indefinable solace, that intermingling sense of integral companionship, which she craved. Indeed, the kisses of the fairest among men but intensified that irritating dissatisfaction and insatiety, that desire for an unattained emotional fulfilment clamoring within her. Alone, she would pace her chamber feverishly, unable to read, unable to think, whipped by the disquietude of her heart. She had long moods of depression and fits of temper. Desperately she threw herself into whatever excitement offered. But it was always in vain; she found no respite. Ever and ever a reiterant, restless craving like a worm gnawed in her heart.

During these two years Mary waxed more dazzling in her beauty. Her body budded into fulness like a wondrous flower; her eyes became more unfathomable, more wondrously changeful in hue like to the viridescent waters of the sea; her hair, more fierily, redly golden. Vice left no marks upon her; her lips became all the redder and more lovely for their many kisses. Mary was incomparable among women.

Mary's aged benefactress cared for her with a fawning solicitousness. She doted upon her, but garnered the earnings which the girl brought. Mary was grateful to the old woman; she had garments of tissue spangled with gold, fans of ospreys, jewels, luxuries in abundance. At the end of two years Mary went to live with a former magistrate of the city, an aged man of boundless wealth, who had met Mary at a banquet given by a friend, and had become enamoured of her. He gave to Mary's duenna, the old courtesan, a sack of

gold and a liberal pension for life. Then he bore the girl, in great state, to his palace, where she became mistress of unlimited riches and of a hundred slaves.

Old Aufugus idolized Mary; he was fatuously enslaved. His relatives were scandalized; they pleaded with him, but he drove them away. Vainglorious of her beauty, Aufugus determined that Mary should become eminent among the women of Alexandria. He gave elaborate banquets to which came men of great rank, wealth, power, and the young aristocracy. Aufugus's long years of rectitude gave way to nights of orgy. He outrivalled the most notorious debauchees by the magnificence of his entertainments. At the head of the banqueting board, and by the side of the decrepit host, Mary would sit, fascinatingly brilliant, gay, adorably lovely, her tawny hair fitfully aflame in the torches' glare.

Mary delightfully led in the conversation; conversed with philosophers, mathematicians, astrologers; she disputed concerning religion, philosophy, and art; criticised the newest plays and volumes of the poets. Men asked her opinion on politics; she became familiar with the intrigues of the empire.

Less than four years before, after the defeat and death of Valens at the battle of Hadrianople, the Emperor Gratian had called Theodosius, the son of Valentinian's great general and himself a noted warrior, to court, made him commander-in-chief against the Goths, and declared him Augustus. Egypt, Asia, Thrace, Macedonia, Dacia, and Illyricum were placed under his sceptre. The Roman Empire had been in great jeopardy, and the raids of the Visigoths had been carried to the very walls of Constantinople. Throughout the territory of the Balkans wars were waged by bands of Ostrogoths, Huns, Alans, and other Germanic tribes. After a successful campaign along the Danube, Theodosius had been crowned Emperor of the East at Constantinople and for two years more he waged war against the Visigoths. After successive victories concord was restored throughout the Balkans, and through the diplomacy of the Emperor the Goths became allies of the Empire, 40,000 of the Germanic warriors enlisting in the service of Theodosius. With peace restored, Gratian ruling the Empire

of the West at Rome, and Theodosius the Empire of the East in pompous splendor at Constantinople, Egypt enjoyed a period of prosperity, Alexandria supplying most of the nations of the world with corn. Among travellers from all lands there began to come to Alexandria Goth warriors who, on pledging allegiance to Theodosius, had received lands in the Empire. Now and then one of these rude, gigantic chieftains from the forests beyond the Danube, clothed in the skin of wild animals, was brought to Aufugus's banquets. These rough barbarians delighted Mary. With the guests Mary talked of the wars that were over, and listened to the thrilling tales of warfare in the German forests. Roman patricians, members of the court of Gratian, Byzantine nobles, foreign merchants, and warriors taking a holiday in travel after their victorious campaigns, came to the house of Aufugus. All who came were enthralled by the beauty and wit of Mary. Princes, warriors, rustic Goths, and philosophers alike became enamoured of her. Words fell like jewels from her lips; she was unsurpassed at repartee. Meanwhile, at the banquets, during conversation and as the courses progressed, old Aufugus would invariably begin to snore. A furtive joke would pass the table. Mary would drolly pluck the old man's beard, playfully chuck his chin, make mock love to him while he slept. The motley company would become convulsed.

Of the most desirable of the guests, Mary engaged in converse with those who pleased her. Among those she favored rankled bitter jealousies; often there were quarrels at the banquets. Because they were a tribute to her vanity, these delighted her. She spurred the rivals with taunts and fed the fires of their envy. There were constant feuds in the city, close friends were estranged, family ties sundered.

Yet in the pallid mornings following banquets, her face pale as ashes, Mary would walk in her gardens alone, obsessed by the old melancholy, tormented with a haunting unrest. Admired, courted, enjoying luxury, her heart still knew no peace. Loved to distraction, Mary realized that it was for her beauty—the carnal beauty of her face, the carnal beauty of her body—alone; no soul ever reached its spirit-hands through the medium of the flesh and touched the hands of her soul; no soul's lips brushed her soul's lips. From all she

remained abysms apart. Mary's suitors passed, for she was capricious, her fancy fitful. She ever desired the thrill of new experiences; the game of beguiling men, of inspiring them with desire and plunging them into despair delighted her more than the consummation of kisses and embraces. Kisses and embraces too often revolted.

In the uncertain contest of love, in playing with men as she played with her pet panther, in watching the effect of her wiles, her tricks of word and gesture, in the expectant curiosity regarding the difference and variation of men's wooing, Mary found the chief zest of her life. Her fame spread; in less than a year all the gay youth of Alexandria flocked to the banquets of Aufugus. Mary made fools of the philosophers, laughed at the silly infatuation of magistrates, merchants, and poets. Those she enamoured lost all interest in life save to be with her. Celebrated athletes who had won in the games loafed in the inns, drowning the grief of her rejection in wine. Youths with brilliant careers before them, artists, poets, political *attachés*, gave themselves up to daft dreams of the woman who heartlessly tormented them by her caprices. If Mary favored any, it was but to kindle them to fiercer ardor, only then to turn to another and fill them with greater anguish. When men suffered, Mary thrilled with joy. Throughout Alexandria men spoke of the suicides of those whom she had driven to despair.

In their haunts the Christians heard of Mary's thrall upon the men of the city, the number of her admirers, and the rumor spread that she was a vampire. The women of Alexandria were devoured with envy; a number, distracted by her sway over their husbands or lovers, sought the soothsayers and magicians to bring misfortune upon her, that she lose her beauty and that maladies afflict her. Once, concealed in a basket of flowers, one sent to Mary the deadly *naja haja*; the basket, believed to be a gift from a suitor, was opened by one of Mary's slaves. The venomous snake darted forth its head, bit the girl on the wrist. Foaming at the mouth, she died. The reptile was killed before it escaped from the basket. Mary was thereafter careful in the examination of gifts.

Mary flaunted her beauty throughout the city. The prophecy of the aged courtesan seemed realized. But one

night Mary's aged lover died. Her spell upon the foolish old man was over. As she gazed into his face, rigid in death, a senile smile frozen on his lips, she experienced a sickly shock. She recalled the day she heard the slaves tell of Maximilian's death, and for a moment the old pang gripped her. She remembered Maximilian's beauty; she gazed upon the mockful face of this man. Horror filled her. Forcing back the tears the memory of Maximilian evoked, she summoned the slaves.

The relatives of Aufugus, conservative and aristocratic people, scandalized by his life, the next day descended upon the house. They drove Mary to the street.

That death should make so great a change in her fortunes Mary had never considered a possibility; her lack of foresight and carelessness in ignoring the future enraged her. She realized she could have secured much of Aufugus's property as well as a great portion of his fortune. Content with her luxurious position, and engrossed in her affairs, the wisdom of this precaution had never occurred to her. But bitterly she had learned a lesson. In the future, of all things, she would be practical. But what now should she do?

With several woman slaves, who carried the caskets of jewels Aufugus and others had given her, she paused under the shade of one of the great sycamores lining the esplanade. She had a legion of admirers, any one of whom would open his heart and purse. But whom should she select; with whom rectify her negligence in the house of Aufugus?

While she paused, lost in deep speculation, Mary's father passed. Startled, she flinched away and for a moment the vision of the huge man's grotesque face filled her with the instinctive fright of her childhood. Recognizing her, Luke paused, then stooped to the street and threw dirt into Mary's face, calling her vile names. Infuriated by the insult, for the first time, her spirit rebelliously rose against the man who had brutally cowed her. All the bitter hatred of years welled up and surcharged her heart. Taking one step toward him fearlessly, Mary cursed, with loathsome words, the man from whose loins she sprang. Hideous objurgations, like adders, leaped from her lips. Mary never realized she knew words so foul. She cursed her father's religion, the Christians, she cursed men.

In excess of passion the words choked in her throat and, screaming with rage, she flung the casket of jewels she carried contemptuously into the huge man's face. Affrighted, as though a demon had appeared in the guise of his daughter, Luke crossed himself and fled. Mary felt an indomitable hatred for her father, for her father's race, for Aufugus, for all men. In her soul, as a worm, there began to writhe the instinctive passion of her sex for revenge.

There lived in the city an aged philosopher, Arsenius by name, a celebrated exponent of Neo-Platonism, and one of the richest men in Alexandria. He had paid attention to Mary at the table of his friend, the dead Aufugus. Mary well remembered her mentor's words concerning the generosity of old men. She went to him. Arsenius was weak, and a pliable victim to Mary's blandishments. Mary had become wise, knowing men; she flattered and cozened the aged philosopher, coaxed from him a great portion of his wealth in property, money, and jewels. He became quite childlike in his folly, and had she not become unconquerably revolted by his decrepitude she might have eventually secured all his wealth. The time came when she could no longer endure him to come into her sight. With money he had given her Mary bought a villa, and, deserting Arsenius, therein established herself. When Arsenius came to plead with her, in maudlin grief, Mary scornfully informed him that he was a decrepit idiot to imagine any woman could love him; that the old were ever ridiculous in love, as though Psyche could have loved Eros if, instead of being a youth and fair, he had been three-score with a bald head. Arsenius's philosophy failed him and, imitating Socrates, he drank wine wherein hemlock had been distilled.

Among those who courted Mary were many men of wealth, captains of the legions, magistrates, merchants, officials of the government. They gave her caskets of jewels, money and rich gifts. She established unlimited credit with money-lenders and revelled in unwonted extravagances. On occasions of feasts and celebrations she sometimes appeared at the theatres and enacted pantomimes. Had she desired, she could have attained a notable career upon the stage. But the life of the public mime did not appeal to her. She possessed money,



luxury, admiration, love. But as ever, in her uncompanied hours, Mary felt the inadequacy of her life—within herself a hunger no love could satiate. She tried to steep herself in philosophy; for a while she studied metaphysics and the older Egyptian religions. She tried to divert herself in the games, attended the circus, gambled on races and gladiatorial contests.

Through certain admirers she became interested in the political intrigues of the metropolis, and for a while was the mistress of Philamon, a corn merchant, considered the wealthiest man in Alexandria, who was reputed to have great influence at the court of Theodosius. Mary used him to secure the appointment of poor favorites to government positions. Philamon was extremely old. When she had secured much gold from him, unable to tolerate him longer, with no explanation, Mary capriciously refused him admittance to her house. The old man, jealously enraged, became her implacable enemy, and, disappointed in love, took a sudden interest in Christianity. At this period Theophilus, succeeding Timothy, became archbishop of Alexandria.

Mary began to feel the stirrings of the desire for power. She wished to wield her will, not merely upon men's emotions and passions, but upon their minds, their thoughts, their works. In less than three years the opportunity came to her. Suddenly closing her villa, she repudiated all her admirers, and became mistress of Aristobolus, high priest of Serapis.

Aristobolus was a man advanced in age, possessing an austere patriarchal and imperial bearing, an indomitable pride, a keen intellect, cruel and relentless cunning. Aristobolus steadfastly and successfully defeated the political machinations of the aggressive and jealous Christian patriarch. He was lord of the pagan superstition of Alexandria. He had amassed great wealth. His influence was vast. In his hands for long the governor had been a tool; his will was the will of the magistrates. He hated, and incited persecutions against, the Christians. He purchased for Mary a palace of marvellous beauty in Bruchheim, gave her slaves, litters, jewels, milk-white horses. Through him she attained a social position, hitherto impossible, among the exclusive aristocracy of Alexandria. Aristobolus loved Mary with a fierce, inexorable jealousy.

## IV

**THE** cult of Serapis was the most powerful of the pagan religions of Alexandria.

Moved by the fiery admonitions and fearless exhortations of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, the emperor, Theodosius the Great, lent his power toward the extirpation of paganism, by edicts abolishing sacrifices, closing temples, abrogating the privileges of heathen priests and contributing, by all the forces of imperial authority, to the establishment and ultimate triumph of the Christian and Catholic Church. As elsewhere in the Empire, persecutions had abated in Egypt, and the Christians were no longer compelled to worship secretly as of old in tombs and caves. Encouraged by the emperor's favor, and by his permission, they converted the temples of pagan gods into churches consecrated to Christ. The new creed spread rampantly, especially among laborers, slaves, and the extreme poor. The communities of cenobites had increased along the Nile. The monastic population of the desert was said to exceed that of the city itself. Warring bands of ascetics now invaded Alexandria by day as well as by night, assailing the Arians, Jews, and pagans, and making attacking raids upon synagogues and the houses of heretics and courtesans.

The patriarch Theophilus, governing his increasing legions of the faithful with an arbitrary and rigid despotism, engaged indefatigably in political intrigue and schemed to increase the temporal power of his see.\* To the degree that Christianity gained in numbers and influence, the divinity of the Ptolemies was worshipped with correspondingly fiercer allegiance and fanaticism by those who feared and hated the religion of the Cross.

The temple of Serapis, one of the most magnificent and

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\* "At that time the archiepiscopal throne of Alexandria was filled by Theophilus, the perpetual enemy of peace and virtue; a bold, bad man whose hands were alternately polluted with gold and with blood."—Gibbon, "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. iii, p. 287.

stupendous edifices in the whole world, stood upon an eminence, within a vast and stately square. The great quadrangular portico was reached by an impressive ascent of a hundred marble steps. Sloping planes for vehicles led on either side to the terrace before the façade of the consecrated temple itself. In the adjacent buildings opening from the portico, on the sides and in the rear, were halls filled with exquisite statuary, representing the noblest arts of the age. In the celebrated library of the temple were preserved the most precious treasures of ancient learning, including the poems of Sappho, and the invaluable classic collection of Pergamus, consisting of two hundred thousand volumes, given to Cleopatra by Marc Antony. The massive architraves of the main edifice were supported by four hundred columns of porphyry. On the pediments and within niches in the cornices were groups depicting the gods of Olympus and the sages of Greece in brass and tinted marble. Beneath the titan plinths the thronging worshippers by contrast appeared like moving ants. The walls of the mighty pile were inlaid with slabs of silver, gold and brass; the three heavy doors in the façade were of hammered metal, thickly set with coruscating designs in jewels. Surmounting the temple swelled a gilded cupola like a monstrous blown bubble of gold. When the sun rose over the yellow desert, the splendid fane, looming above the roof-tops of the city, brilliantly flamed as though it were built of living fire.

Within a semicircular sanctuary, in the rear of the temple, the statue of Serapis rose almost to the height of the roof. The two open arms of the image extended the inordinate width of the shrine, touching the walls on either side. So oppressively overwhelming was the idol in its very bulk that its worshippers, at the mere sight of it, were stricken with terror and reverent awe. Only Christians mocked the monstrous divinity. But even among the Christians were many who regarded the idol with superstitious fear. For while, by previous edicts of Theodosius, sacrifices to the heathen gods were prohibited elsewhere in the Empire, they were still tolerated in Alexandria, where the rites of Serapis were performed, with hierarchal solemnity and splendor. So gorgeous was the temple, so munificent the gifts of the devotees, so rich

the priesthood, that the cult of Serapis aroused the covetous envy of the Christian archbishop, Theophilus. The pagans confidently believed that should any outrage be offered the image of the majestic god the end of the world would come, and the heavens and earth be instantly reduced to their original chaos. Lest an affront to the god jeopardize the rising of the Nile, his river, the credulous Christians themselves refrained, while they indiscriminately and fearlessly violated other temples, from offering insult to the celestial ruler of Egypt himself.

The figure represented an old man, seated upon a throne, in his left hand the sceptre of all-governing heavenly power. About the breast and right arm of the prodigious idol coiled a monster serpent, whose flat, venomous head rested upon the god's outstretched right hand, and from whose triple tails terminated three animal heads—in the centre of the breast of the idol that of a lion, on the right that of a dog with drooling tongue, and on the left that of a ferocious wolf. The scowling features of the god were superannuated and wrinkled with age; the eyes were alert and cruel. At the feet of the image crouched Cerberus, the dog of hell. Upon the head was a bushel, filled with vegetables and fruit. This represented the fertility of the earth.

Constructed of wood, the idol was painted black merging into blue. From the enormous height of its head to its feet it was ornately inlaid with plates of gold and silver encrusted with precious stones, jasper, topazes, turquoises, amethysts, chalcedony, beryls, pearls, carbuncles, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. Many were the size of hens' eggs; they were of priceless value.

The rays of the sun poured through a hole so constructed in the roof of the sanctuary that the full flood, halo-wise, fell upon the face of Serapis. Then the jewels took fire, the image became animated, the agate eyes glimmered with furtive, watchful consciousness. Sometimes the lips were seen to move.

To the temple, each morning, multitudes came to worship—the governor, magistrates, merchants, men of wealth, philosophers, poets, the fashionable women of the city, and courtesans. They came in curricles, litters, and afoot. Unto

Alexandria, the holy city, came also pilgrims from far parts, riding on asses, camels, and elephants, some bearing luxuriously-appointed palanquins. At these assemblages Mary, mistress of Aristobolus, was a conspicuous figure. Rejoicing in her youth, her exuberant beauty, her envied position as mistress of one of the most powerful men in Egypt, she moved, haughty, self-possessed, self-conscious, disdainful, among the wealthiest and most famous women of Alexandria.

Late one morning Mary paced to and fro in the shadow of the great pillars awaiting Aristobolus. The hour for service had long passed, and still the high priest did not come. From within the temple came the sound of chanting. Impatient at the high priest's delay, Mary finally turned toward the teeming throng making its way through the main doorway. She was about to enter when she beheld Aristobolus leap from his litter on the terrace below and rush excitedly up the portico steps. To Mary's amazement the austere high priest, wontedly calm and imperturbably dignified, seemed carried away by uncontrollable emotion. His face was inflamed, perspiration bathed his brow. Panting, he gesticulated wildly, scarce able to speak; but presently he found voice.

"Serapis, curse the infidels! God of the Egyptians, that I, thy priest, should have lived to behold such outrages! That mine eyes should have witnessed swine thus polluting the holy mysteries! Filthy worshippers of rags and rotten bones of slaves! Holy Serapis, smite them with plagues and confusion, paralyze them with the bolts of thy mighty wrath! Curses be upon them!"

Amazed by the high priest's violence, the stream of worshippers paused. Mary, filled with alarm and misgiving, touched the high priest on the arm.

"Peace, Aristobolus! What hath happened? Of what infamies dost thou speak?"

Clad in full pontificals, a garment of white, embroidered with silver, a low mitre on his head, the high priest was majestic and terrible in his wrath. His face was distorted, his gray beard trembled, his eyes blazed. His arm shook as he invoked the deity of the Egyptians.

"Holy Serapis, woe unto me! Woe unto Alexandria! Oh, Theodosius, what madness hath beset thee! Most miserable of men, what insanity hath replaced thy reason!"

The excited crowd increased, among them professors of philosophy, several magistrates, many great men of the city, their sons, elderly matrons, their daughters discreetly veiled, courtesans bedizened in gay apparel.

"What hath happened? What infamy hath occurred?" they whispered.

"Peace! Be circumspect in what thou sayest concerning the Emperor." Mary's face blanched. "But tell us, I beg thee, what has occurred?"

"The Christians! The Christians!" Aristobolus thundered. "The dogs have outraged the gods! They have profaned the unutterable mysteries! Woe! Woe! It is not to be borne! God of the Egyptians, let thy lightnings descend! Let the heavens and earth be reduced!"

The crowd gasped. A low cry of indignation arose.

"The Christians! What have the Christians done?"

"Depend not upon the lightning and the gods," said Mary. "They strike no more. The gods have become impotent. But tell us, I beg thee, what have the Christians done?"

"The dogs! The dogs!" voices rose. "Tell us what they have done!"

Aristobolus, gaining in self-control, turned about, his voice bellowing:

"People of Alexandria! What days of desolation have come upon us! These foul jackals of Christians have come forth openly from their catacombs. They have carried on their proselyting until they include the scum of the city—slaves, laborers, criminals, and blacks. Unto this illiterate rabble they preach equality with those who have the blood of kings! The monks as plagues infest our streets. They have peopled the desert with madmen! Their god is a seditionist! And the emperor, yea, he who conquered the barbarians, gives way to curry favor with such as these! Yea, let contumely rest upon him! He overcame Maximus, the invader from Gaul, only to be conquered and terrified by the vulgar Ambrose! An emperor bullied and dominated by a Christian bishop!

Woe unto us that a hero should fall so low! Woe upon him for what he hath brought upon us!"

"But what have the Christians done? What crime hath Theophilus committed?" the voices clamored.

"When there came to Alexandria, not long since, a rescript from the Emperor favoring the Christian Church," Aristobolus raged, with fierce, sweeping gestures, "we bowed our heads with lamentation that folly could emanate from a seat so great. We looked into the majestic face of Serapis, he who incarnates the revivifying powers of the universe, and asked whether his divine majesty would permit the affront; whether the mighty gods from their high seats would not smite those who would apotheosize a beggar and carpenter! We bowed in prayer! We implored Serapis! We besought Isis! But the gods were silent! In the holy temple of Bacchus, given to the Christians by direct order of the Emperor, impious hands tore down the figure of the kindly god—in whose cup is the wine of the world's joy—and in his stead they placed their accursed symbol of death! But, ah, people of Alexandria, such was not to be the extent of their impiety! Intoxicated with the favor of Theodosius, this very morn they committed the sublime, the ineffable affront to the gods, the unbearable sacrilege whereunder all Alexandria should mourn as though for the death of her first-born!"

The great expanse of steps thronged with an ever-thickening crowd of people, in vari-colored garments, craning their necks and listening with bated breath. The stream of camels, elephants, mules, litters, and curricles halted in the square below. Elephants trumpeted. From the teeming assemblage rose the cry:

"What have they done? Thou hast not told us what the Christians have done!"

Aristobolus raised his voice. His perspiring face blanched with the very awesomeness of his words:

"Perchance ye may remember that nigh to thirty years ago these foul and insolent *polloï* attempted to desecrate the temple of Mithra, breaking into the most holy chambers and exposing to public contempt the relics of those secret and sacred sacrifices whereby divinations are given to men! Yea, then it

was their audacious purpose utterly to violate the holy place, destroy the temple, and in outrageous mockery to build thereupon a church—but their purpose was frustrated. Perchance ye remember that no sooner had that unspeakable desecration been attempted, the true believers fell upon the swine—they were stoned, hanged with ropes, and crucified. Yea, and by the righteous indignation of the faithful, were they compelled to desist and flee, and their leader, the infamous George, a worthy predecessor of Theophilus, was tied to a camel, torn limb from limb, and with the camel burned in flames.\* That was nigh to thirty years ago. But times have changed since then! Woe! Woe unto us!

“Hearken unto me. This very morn, after they had performed their rites of mockery in their churches, swollen and gluttoned with pride in the favor of a craven ruler, by order of Theophilus, these brazen upstart swine went again to the august shrine of Mithra and there consummated the unutterable indignity wherein they had failed before. Hearken unto me, O people! This very morn the Christians opened up the deep adytum and from the sealed and sacred chambers beneath, wherein they had been preserved for years, the vile dogs brought forth the sacred and most holy mysteries of Mithra!”

Lifting one hand, Aristobolus spoke with slow, terrible, emphatic enunciation.

“In these sacred and consecrated chambers of the temple where the pious had offered sacrifice to the blessed Mithra, he who was born of the rocks, who killed the sacred bull, and who ascended into heaven to watch over his faithful, the Christian curs committed sacrileges for which I have no name! Nay, they were not satisfied in making a travesty of the true god in their carpenter, in endowing the Galilean with the qualities of Mithra—his virginal incarnation, his atonement for the sins of the world, and his ascent into heaven; nor were they content in impiously mocking the holy rites, and imitating that sacred sacramental supper with the breaking of bread, but in contumelious mockery they dared, not an hour ago, to violate the god, destroy his images, and desecrate his mysteries! They

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\* An act which evoked official reproof from the Emperor Julian, about 361 A.D.



now go forth in insolent procession, even unto the Agora, exposing to ridicule and contempt on the public highways the sacrificial vessels and relics of the god!"

The entire assemblage shuddered. A groan of rage arose.

"I have just come thence!" shouted Aristobolus. "I have seen the madmen parading, and defiling the most holy mysteries, with mine own eyes! Yea, they called vile names to me as I passed! They are drunk with audacious and overbearing impudence!"

Aristobolus smote his breast and tore his garments. With a wail of desolation and fury, he yelled:

"The Christians have usurped the temple of Bacchus! The Christians have profaned the mysteries of Mithra! They have set up in derision and scorn, in the midst of the Forum, Priapus, god of life!"

The high priest's cry, like a wave, rolled over the sea of humanity. Shrieks of rage, groans, and yells of indignation filled the air. To the outermost edge of the square and into the streets, thronged with ever-growing hundreds, the news spread, and, as it passed, the cries of outraged wrath swelled in volume.

In the midst of the clamor Mary, her face pale, her eyes terrible, slowly advanced from the side of Aristobolus to the verge of the portico. Revealed in the full flood of sunlight, above the heads of the populace and before the colossal shrine, her tall figure, swathed in a mantle of sable tissues brodered with pearl-and-silver figures of the Zodiac, towered like the incarnation of the implacable Nemesis. Above the blazing fury of her eyes, like fiery horns, burned a crescent tiara of diamonds. Extended, trembling, her right arm, covered with hoops of ebony and serpentine circlets of massy gold encrusted with sapphires and diamonds, flared with a million basilisk eyes. From her tiara to the barbaric rings in her ears, and from the bracelets on her wrists to the gem-studded bands about her ankles were suspended slender chains glinting with antique medallions and irid stones. On her heaving breast, throbbing with intermittent sentience as she breathed, hung a monstrous pendant of the sort the women of perished Pompeii had worn, delicately chased of gold and mounted as a dragon-fly in flight, with wings, jewels-set, of azure.

The uproar ceased. In the sudden silence Mary's cold, vibrant, penetrating, passionless voice swept over the square.

"Men of Alexandria, you have heard the unspeakable profanation. These audacious helots have spat their contempt upon your gods. They vomit insults upon you. The image of Priapus they parade in derisive contumely of your faith. Yea, vilely they befoul you! Depend not upon the gods to strike! Call no lightnings from the skies! Curses are futile, lamentations vain. Men of Alexandria, where is your honor, where your pride? I call upon you! If there runs the red blood of Egypt in your veins; if your hearts are not of jelly; if you are not cravens willing to suffer the spewing contempt of criminals and slaves, lift your hands in vengeance! Yea, now—now ere the dogs go too far! Fall upon the nests of these vermin! Root them out! Crush them under your feet! Extirpate them from the earth! Strike before, in their increasing might, they strike again at you! For they menace you! Do they veil their threats? They are grown too bold. They would rule this city and usurp and plunder our temples!" Her voice chilled those who listened with its ominousness.

"Hearken unto me, for the menace is upon you! Ye have heard how, in Gaul, the audacious Martin of Tours, leading his rabble of monks, destroyed temples, overthrew the altars of the gods and felled the consecrated trees whereunder the white lamb had been slain! Ye have heard how, in Syria, their bishop Marcellus assaulted the very temple of Jupiter, levelling it to the ground, and how in vulgar jubilation, with soldiers and gladiators, he ravished the temples and plundered the villages of Apamea! Yea, and have ye forgotten so soon how these contemptible helots invaded the glorious temple of the heavenly Venus at Carthage,\* therein setting up instead of the tender goddess their ignominious cross!

"Tribulation has come upon the world, men of Alexandria. Rome mourned when the splendid altar of Victory was destroyed by Gratian!—but how shall the world lament when an emperor drags by his chariot wheels the desecrated statues of the gods! What shall we say of the abrogation of the rights of

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\* The precincts of this temple formed a circumference of two miles.

our priests, the prohibition of sacrifices and the confiscation of our temples throughout the empire for the enrichment of the army and the church favored by the emperor! Ye have heard of the ravages of these vile hordes in every province. Christian monks and bishops have enriched themselves in looting the sacred shrines of the gods of their treasures. Temples have been polluted and plundered and turned into manufactories, magazines for storing corn for the armies and Christian worshipping places! Where the exalted divinities once reigned the Christians have put up their altars, and have there enshrined for worship the heads, salted and pickled, of the meanest malefactors! The ashes of slaves they have put into golden vases covered with silken veils! Yea, have ye not heard how to the banks of the Bosphorus they carried in solemn pomp from Palestine the carcasses of two fishermen, deifying them in churches as gods! Men of Alexandria, these have but been the beginning of outrages! Save in Alexandria, these mad zealots have nowhere stopped in the excesses of their atrocities! And in our holy city alone they feared to go too far! But now the danger is upon us! It is within our gates!—it is at our doors! The dogs fear us no longer, and for this ye are to blame! Without protest ye let Theophilus's curs install their vile worship in the temple of Bacchus. Ye were silent. Are ye cowards, men of Alexandria? Will ye let this religion of slaves prevail? Will ye suffer these low scavengers of the earth openly to desecrate the holy mysteries without reprisal? Are ye utterly ignoble? Are ye utterly craven? Are ye meek-necked poltroons? Men of Alexandria, will ye lick the spittle of these impudent helots? *Arise!*" Her voice ripped through the air. "Arise, men of Alexandria! Go forth—the time is ripe! Go forth lest in their mounting effrontery and arrogance these wild jackals do here what they have done with impunity elsewhere in the empire! Theophilus and his jackals plan further enterprises. Aye, having pillaged your temples and insulted your gods, they next would destroy this very temple of the august Serapis himself!"

A low murmur of horror rolled up from the crowd. Mary's voice hissed like the lash of a whip:

"Vengeance, men of Alexandria! Vengeance! Go forth!

Fall upon the Christians! Drag them forth! Silence their blasphemous tongues! Stop their outrages! Choke their insults! Teach them to fear as they did of yore the light of day and to cower from the children of the gods! Drive them back to their graves and bones and rags! Mete unto them all their defamations deserve! Men of Alexandria, even now they carry forth Priapus in insult and obloquy! Go forth! Is it not high time to avenge the gods? May the ire of Serapis inflame you! Drag the dogs hither! Bring them to this holy place! As they have defiled our inviolable mysteries, let them be tortured and held up to derision! As they have paraded the god of life in the market-place, bring them hither and make them bow under the stroke of whips to our outraged divinity!"

There was an awesome hush, baleful, portentous, silent as the voice of death. Then, fired by the fury of Mary's passion, a wild sob, as of enraged beasts released to carnage, went up:

"Avenge the gods! Bring the Christians hither! Let the dogs bow to Serapis or die! Death to the helots!"

The vast expanse of faces inflamed with rage. The raucous responses merged into one monstrous voice. Tumultuously Mary's heart dilated with a savage exultation; through her veins flowed the drunkenness of hatred. All the goading resentment Mary had nourished for years against her father for the wrong he had inflicted, against his companions who had stoned her and the Christian monks, *polloi* and beggars who missed no opportunity even now in her day of eminence to revile her, erupted in words torrential and burning as lava.

Crouching at the very edge of the topmost step of the temple, she leaned forward, her basilisk-gemmed arms outstretched, her fists clenched, her eyes narrowing. As if that vast audience were a single confidant, as if she addressed each listener individually, intimately, Mary told of her childhood, of the cave where the Christians had engaged in sorcery, of the brutal father who spat upon her dead mother's face, of the dogs who stoned her. Her voice panted and hoarsened with her raging, ungovernable hate. And the crowd, listening, whipped by the fury of her rancor, groaned aloud.

"Even so have I suffered!" Through the narrowed lids

her eyes glowed like green coals. "And as I have suffered, so shall your children! As I have been stoned, so shall your children be stoned! Yea, these dogs are enemies of life. They are worshippers of death! They would annihilate this very temple, they would overthrow the image of Serapis! They would utterly subjugate you!"

Looming to her full height and drawing back, she wailed out the crimes ascribed to the Christians—their worship of negro slaves, their secret sorceries, the plagues and droughts they brought upon the city with their spells, their maltreatment of children. Like winged reptiles, stinging those who heard, vile objurgations leaped from her mouth. The ringed fingers of her hands, like grasping white talons, closed and unclosed with murderous rapacity as she harangued the men of Alexandria to go forth, to lay their hands upon the throats of the dogs, to tear out their tongues, and to drag them over the stones to punishment at the Serapium.

Mary paused for breath. Then, with both clenched fists raised above her head, she screamed out:

"Men of Alexandria, go! Kill Christians! *Kill! Kill!*"

Dead silence. Then, with a wild howl, the mob, dispersing, fired with her passion, poured back through the diverging streets into the city, shrieking Mary's battle-cry:

"The Christians have defiled the temple of Bacchus. They have polluted the holy mysteries. Bring the dogs to the Serapium! Kill the Christians! Kill! Kill!"

Carried into all quarters by the raging mobs, constantly swelling in numbers, Mary's call to vengeance, like a fell incantation, cast a mad red spell upon the city. Within the space of an hour the entire metropolis, from the Canopic gate to the Necropolis, was inflamed by the news of the Christian outrage. Goaded beyond endurance, to a fanatic fury of indignation, the pent-up antagonism and resentment against the abhorred sect, long repressed because of the imperial favor, now broke forth, and, fearless, unthinking of consequences, the citizens left their beds, their breakfasts, and their labors to riot in bloody massacre. Alexandria became a shambles.

Streams of excited workmen poured from the glass, perfume, and papyrus factories, from the storehouses and grana-

ries. Vendors of fruits, foodstuffs, perfumes, fabrics, deserted their booths, leaving their merchandise to the mercy of thieves. Fearless of scourgings, slaves dropped their tasks in the domains of the rich and poured into the streets. Along the wharves fishermen, dock-hands, sailors, sellers of trinkets and animal pets ceased their activities and rushed through the Gate of the Moon up the great esplanade.

“Death to the worshippers of dead men’s bones! Put the dogs to torture! Bring them unto Serapis! Let the gods be avenged!”

Old beggar women, carried away by the hysteric reports of the outrage, pounded their canes palsiedly on the pave and whined curses. At the Gate of the Moon an aged soothsayer dropped her tray of charms and aphrodisiacs and writhed in a fit of epilepsy. A snake-charmer, electrified by the ominous news, dropped her pets carelessly in the midst of a market in Rhacotis. Affrighted by mottled cobras and arrow-snakes crawling toward the curb, children uttered cries of frenzied terror, women fainted. Groups of people, shouting, gesticulating, gathered at the corners of the streets. Gaining in exaggeration, the reports of the indignity were repeated. The Christians were accused of engaging in divers abominable rites, in monstrous sorceries, of bringing droughts, spells of intolerable heat, and deadly plagues upon the city. It was recalled that the Patriarch Theophilus had predicted the destruction of Serapia. The rumor went that the accursed sect had engaged in a conspiracy to destroy the Serapium.

Mobs streamed through the thoroughfares, carrying bludgeons, spikes, maces, chains, ropes, metal instruments of torture used in the prisons, and flaming torches with which to burn the Christians from their hovels. Patricians, who had banqueted late the night before, were rudely aroused from their slumbers, and, without bathing or eating, came drowsily forth in their palanquins, curious to learn the cause of the disorder. Hearing the news, they leaped from their luxurious conveyances and joined the march with laborers and slaves.

From the quarter of the Jews, yelling and whining, thronged hundreds—old men with long beards and hags of women with the faces of mummies. Between the Jews and

Christians a long feud had raged—against the Israelites the Patriarch had been violent in his fulminations. For once the despised Jews and patricians joined in a single enthusiasm, and all bore down from various parts of the city to the temple of Mithra, where the profanation had been committed, to churches where the worshippers were partaking of the sacraments, and to monasteries and the dwelling quarters of the Christians. Street gamins, even little children leaning from the casement windows, lent their voices to the call which Mary had sent from the Serapium:

“Make the Christians sacrifice to Serapis! Make them abjure the Cross! Let them taste flame! Kill the Christians!”

Squads of stationaries, summoned forth by the riot, poured from the folding doors of guard-houses. The guards were composed of men who had served in many wars, human brutes who serve as chaff in battles. They possessed the Roman contempt for subservient peoples, and their thirst for blood had been long unallayed. They had chafed against the monotony of municipal service; their only diversions of late years had been the quelling of riots between Christians and Jews. These men, who mostly subscribed to the religion of Serapis, hated the Christians with the true ardor of pagans. They had long fumed against the patronage and support given by the Emperor to the Christian Church, and had resented the assumption of power and officious pretensions of the Alexandrian Patriarch. Reaching the streets, hearing the cries of the mobs, the blood of these men bounded beneath their steel.

“Death to the Christians! To the torture! They adore a gibbet! They worship death! They deify slaves! They indulge in sorcery! They bring plagues upon the city! To the Serapium! Let the dogs be crucified!”

The stationaries knew the sentiments of the Governor. As for the Emperor, it was time he realized his folly and the indignation of his subjects. Chief officers, astride horses, issued orders to their companies. Instead of charging they marched grimly forth, joining and abetting the mobs.

Assaulting the doors of monasteries, soldiers and citizens alike seized the monks, stripped them of their garments, and bore them, naked, into the streets. They surrounded churches

where the Christians sang hymns. Sometimes the worshippers resisted. The majority, praying, surrendered. They were beaten with bludgeons and maces, manacled with chains, and tied with ropes. Unable to restrain their blood-lust until they reached the Serapium, the rioters struck their victims, flogged them, spat upon them, stoned them, and sometimes split their skulls. They demolished the Christian altars, trampled the crosses and holy vessels under foot. Bearing down upon the living quarters, the mobs smashed in the doors of the Christians' houses. The men fought. But they were struck senseless or overpowered. Many of the women were ruthlessly violated by the savage men of the legions. Babies were fiercely torn from their mothers' breasts and trampled under foot. Children, able only to lisp the Holy Name, were thrust into the maws of the yelling mobs. Having secured their victims, the pagans gleefully set fire to the dwellings.

While the Patriarch Theophilus, in a bare and dirty room of a house hidden in a poor quarter of the city, counselled with his deacons and asked guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer, the prefect of Egypt, robed in his laticlave, the broad purple-banded toga worn as a sign of office, sat by a casement window of his palace and listened to reports of the massacre with mingled feelings of misgiving and secret gratification. Apprehensive of the consequences when news of the uprising should reach the Emperor, he was nevertheless reluctant to interfere with the mob. The impertinent assumptions of Theophilus in municipal affairs had become a sore point with His Excellency. From his window he could hear the rumbling noise of the rioters as they swelled and raged in torrential human rivers through the streets. Now and then from afar a frenzied scream would rend the air, piercing the tumult of the mob. There was something sinister in the wail of human rage or suffering.

"Excellency, the populace hath gone mad! There is no quarter of the city that is not affected. They strangle those who marched in procession even now in the Forum. The mobs are ungovernable!"

"They seize the Christians in the temple of Bacchus! They drag them through the streets!"



"They bring the victims to the Serapium! They crucify them to the pillars!"

"Noble lord, the Jews have joined the riot! Theophilus demands protection of the guards! The Patriarch demands that thou suppress the uprising! He swears he will demand reprisal of the Emperor!"

As each message came, the Governor became more and more disturbed, and rings, marks of a past night's debauchery, widened under his eyes. He clapped his hands fiercely. A slave salaamed.

"Wine! Thou dotard! By the head of the Emperor, I shall have thee flogged! Haste! Bring me wine! My throat cracks! 'Tis as dry as the desert! By Vulcan, the day is hot!"

Above the city the canopied sky was as bluely lustrous as sheeny satin. Not a breath of air was stirring. The palm trees in the garden seemed gripped in an enchanted rigidity. From the red sand-hills of the desert beyond the city, the only movement on the still torrid morn, heat waves rose dizzily.

His Excellency quaffed a goblet of cooled, honey-sweetened Syrian wine with avidity. A courier, extending his arm in greeting, appeared. The Governor gave permission to speak.

"Most noble lord! The prefect of the guards is powerless to command order! The stationaries abet the mobs!"

The Governor settled into his chair and extended his empty cup to the effeminate boy who served his wine. Flies buzzed in assaults upon the mosquito netting at the casement. In the palace gardens bees hummed drowsily. Looking forth, the Governor saw thin, spiral curls of smoke rising over the housetops. They rose lazily, as if of no import, but as the minutes passed, with appalling growth, the spiral trunks unfolded into cloud-masses like to the monstrous black trees of the genii in the limbs of which writhed snakes of fire.

Awhile later the Governor's secretary, a withered creature with bent shoulders, appeared.

"Most high lord, a message from Theophilus!"

"Read."

The secretary broke the seals and unwound the scroll. The Patriarch demanded protection for the Christians and a

quelling of the riot. He threatened the wrath of heaven upon the city. He announced the sending of a complaint to the Emperor. While his message was indignant and dictatorial, the closing passages became piously beseeching, even importunate. He pleaded for armed protection from the guards.

The Governor played with his jewelled necklaces. His face framed a malicious smile. He chuckled softly. The secretary, echoing his master, gave vent to a series of croaks.

"By Minerva," emphatically declared the Governor, "the dogs deserve all they get! The gods wot I am helpless—who is ever so helpless as the governor of a people? But the message of our esteemed friend, my Harmodious, it savoreth of humor, eh? After threatening us with the anger of his vulgar heaven, yon pious caitiff beggeth the help of the municipal police! Yon illiterate rascal hath been too vainglorious in his vaunted influence with the most divine of emperors! He hath too long insolently disdained to abide by our rulings! Yea, hath he not virtually set up a rival governorship over his pack? Hath he not often ordered—yea, commanded—me in most rude terms to send legionaries forth to arrest the Jews? But now his stiff neck doth bend! Eh? His carpenter god faileth to send stationaries from heaven! Ha, ha! He prayeth, and no bolts descend from the skies! So he asketh official succor from his excellency, the Governor! Hearken! I confess me, Harmodious, I am a bit dubious of the Emperor. After his triumph over Maximus 'tis said he is given to much drinking and to the Christian superstition! Still, yon sounds are music to my soul!" The prefect lifted one plump palm to his ear and bent his head. From without came a series of heartrending shrieks, then the gustful shouts of a mob tormenting a victim. "More wine, my rosebud! 'Tis verily a hot morning!" He extended his cup and playfully chucked the blushing wine-boy under the chin. "Even so, I know not what will come of this! Harmodious, I should not be surprised if it cost me my position! Still, with the Jews refusing to pay taxes and the dogs of Christians killing the Arians and making trouble with the Jews, I would retire me to my pleasant vineyards in Sicily without regret. A fine estate have I in Sicily, Harmodious—thither shalt thou go with me."

"But the reply, Excellency?" Harmodious waited.

"Aye, my reply. Bethink thee, 'tis unwise to give yon jackal unnecessary cause for complaint to the Emperor! Write him that we are plunged in grief, and have spent ceaseless hours endeavoring to restore order! Thou mightest tell him that the prefect of the guards was ever lacking in discipline, and that his unexampled incompetence hath at last resulted in mutiny of the troops. Ah! Excellent idea! For what are subordinates except to assume responsibility when things go wrong! I have no love, I assure thee, for the rascally Domintius. He was ever slow in sharing the tithes of his office. We need to shield ourselves with the Emperor! Best, also, my fine scribe, send a full account of the trouble to the most noble of the Cæsars, tempered as thy discretion dictates—for thou knowest, unlovely knave, excellently how to frame a letter. Express to the divine one our distress, tell of our indefatigable efforts to command the troops and protect the Christians. Thou mightest say also that the Jews have long conspired against them, and that by means of bribery they have not only enlisted the chiefs of the stationaries to their purposes, but have debauched the vulgar of the populace! Thou knowest the Emperor hath no more love of the knaves than I! All good men hate the Jews. By Medusa, with just cause! And mind, Harmodious, to describe our grief!"

"'Tis said," spoke the servile secretary, "that the mobs are led by Olympiodorus, once one of the lovers of the incomparable Mary! 'Tis she who inspired the riot this morning, and still, so the heralds bring the news, rageth before the temple as a tigress stung with wasps!"

The Governor sat up.

"Ah, in this, as in all things that concern the men of the land, the incomparable one hath her hand. Now go! In thy message to the most august of the Cæsars be circumspect as thou writest of the good Aristobolus. I would no harm befall my friend. Thou hadst best lay the blame on some other—Olympiodorus—why not Olympiodorus? He leadeth the mobs! Put that into the records. Of course, thou wilt lay stress on the lack of efficiency on the part of Domintius. Fail not to impress upon the divine one the distress of our humble self!" Harmodious, his stylus and scroll in hand, retired.

In the palace gardens the bees monotonously hummed; the trees with drooping leaves seemed to drowse. Above the red-and-white roof-tops of the city, a perturbed forest of evil enchantment, spiral volumes of smoke spread a maleficent blackness against the satin sky. The quarters of the Christians were aflame. His temples reddening, the rings under his eyes darkening, the Governor sat, still fatuously smiling, and listened to the clamor of the mobs while he absently played with his necklace and emptied goblet after goblet of snow-cooled, spiced Syrian wine.

From early morning, when the trouble started, Mary was the centre of that red riot, the inspiring spirit of that lustful carnage. None who saw ever forgot her. Never had she appeared so balefully, awe-inspiringly beautiful. Ranged along the temple terrace, a troop of legionaries, their spear-butts resting upon the stones, were prepared to check any advance of the mob. Within a semicircle of guards Mary moved in the free space. Inflamed by her words, Olympiodorus, a philosopher of great repute and noted austerity of life who loved her, had gone into the city organizing skirmishing mobs and sending them forth to seize the Christians wherever they might be found. Among the most zealous leaders of the marauding bands were Helladius, a priest of Jupiter, and Ammonius, a priest of Simius.

Heading the band that rushed to the site of the desecrated shrine of Mithra, Helladius, with his own hand, in the space of less than an hour, killed nine Christians. Stoned, beaten with clubs, attacked with swords, the Christians found rejoicing over the desecration of the shrine precipitately fled, pursued by the pagans, many being captured, and a number wounded.

Not long after Mary's impassioned call to vengeance captives began to arrive at the Serapium. Shortly after her wild, infectious cry, "Bring the Christians hither! Kill! Kill!" a blood-curdling yell shrilled from one of the streets converging in the square. Picked up from lip to lip, it carried through the crowd to the ascent of the temple. Buffeting their way through the tumultuous crests of angry faces, a fierce group of whining, shrieking, bearded Jews among them

brought the carnage's first victim. Howling curses upon the followers of the Nazarene, a huge Israelite, his beard flecked with foam, bounded up the temple steps, dragging by her manacled wrists a girl of perhaps seventeen, her face scarred, her hair unbound and snarled. Savagely he flung her upon the pavement of the terrace at Mary's feet.

"Scourge her!" yelled the courtesans, who crowded in the cleared space behind Mary on the portico. World- and pleasure-sated, the scarred hearts of those bedizened creatures throbbed with resurgent flushes at the sight of this tender victim and in the anticipation of witnessing human anguish.

A dozen priests darted forward swinging great scourges. But Mary, with compassion, imperiously waved them back.

"Nay, send her to my house," she said to the captain of the guards. "She shall be my slave."

The Christian maiden was carried away through the temple by two soldiers to a fate which, to her, was worse than death.

Through the circle of soldiers a band of rioters thrust a young monk, beardless and beautiful as Adonis, stripped of his garments by clawing hands, his white body bleeding. His lips murmured prayers. When he opened his eyes and saw Mary, he pointed accusingly toward her.

"Woman of Babylon," he shrieked, "thy sins are written against thee in hell!"

"Tie him to the pillar!" commanded Mary, coldly. "Break his limbs!"

A half-dozen legionaries seized him.

The courtesans gazed upon him with admiration.

"The dog is beautiful," said one.

"Aye, as Apollo!" enthusiastically declared another.

"Do your will with him," laughing sardonically, Mary called to them. Unresisting, the lad was lifted by soldiers and bound with ropes to one of the pillars, in the full view of the populace. Surrounding him, the courtesans playfully teased him with their ostrich fans. Thrilling with pleasure, some tauntingly pricked his thighs with their jewelled hair-pins. Others mockingly caressed his limbs with their hands. The youth, praying to God for strength, would rather the soldiers had pierced his heart with a spear.

## V

**HIGH** on the blackish-purple porphyry pillar, his limbs lashed with ropes, his white body exposed in the hot glare of the sun, the young monk gazed upon the savage multitude gloating upon his agony. Through their midst increasing numbers of martyrs were brought to share his fate. When the wanton women teased him, spasms of revulsion convulsed his limbs. But his soul within was filled with exaltation; his lips moved with sweetly confident prayer. For to him, as to his brethren, the gates of heaven were goldenly opening beyond the satin skies.

Moving down the steps of the temple with charged spears, a troop of stationaries cleared a pathway through the congested throng and, parting in two flanks, maintained an open space from the level of the square up to the main entrance of the shrine. Riotous outbreaks at the outlying boundaries of the square where the streets converged indicated the arrival of bands with fresh victims. Zigzagging lines through the sea of faces, accompanied by demoniac howling, marked the approach of those intended for sacrifice.

Dragged over the stones by ropes tied to their feet or hands, buffeted brutally by the mob, struck with fists and bludgeons, stoned, spat upon, the captives were brought to the cleared pathway and up to the porch of the temple—priests and deacons captured in churches, their vestments defiled by mud and blood; monks, their haircloth garments torn to tatters, their bodies bleeding; old men and women, bent and withered with years, their faces as wizened and parched as the mummies of the tombs along the Nile, but in their eyes the hope of life everlasting; matrons, clutching babies to their breasts; maidens and youths, lovely in the freshness of their budding, in their eyes a melting ardence, in their voices, as they rose in song, a joy beyond the joy that young life has to give. There were women heavy with child, whom the soldiers found savage delight in striking with their spear-butts; troops of slaves, among them gigantic blacks, some of whom held their heads aloft with pride, knowing their souls were white. Of those

strong, huge men many went to martyrdom with the gentle submissiveness of driven lambs. Others fought, but they were soon overcome. Craven with fear, some of the blacks grovelingly pleaded for mercy and abjured Christ. The steps of the temple became moist with blood. In the sunlight a saline exhalation rose, teasing the nostrils and incensing the mob.

On the porch of the temple minor attendants to the divinity offered the Christians chaplets of flowers, salvers of fruits, wine, and honey-cakes.

"Sacrifice to Serapis! Confess our god or die!"

Soldiers prodded the Christians with the points of spears. The courtesans mocked them. Even the respectable matrons of Alexandria offered indignities.

Whining with fear, some of the negroes took the proffered offerings, and acknowledged the divinity of Serapis. Some were then driven away, amid jeers and blows; others constrained to assist in the torture of their stauncher brethren.

"Bow before Serapis! Dogs! Insolent swine, down on your knees! Down! Curse the Cross!"

Raising their eyes heavenward, the Christians replied:

"We confess Christ crucified!"

A deafening clamor arose from the crowd:

"Crucify the Christians! Let there be sacrifice to Serapis! Build the fires! Let the dogs taste flame!"

Great ladders were dragged across the terrace and placed against the monolithic pillars. Ropes and chains were fastened about the columns and flung over improvised pulleys. Inflammable material, papyrus, wood, and *débris*, was piled about the base of the tall plinths. The martyrs were stripped, their limbs tied with ropes. Lifted up the ladders in the arms of herculean soldiers, they were tightly lashed, with arms extended, in the manner of those crucified, upon the face of the columns. This method was inspired by a contemptuous mockery of the Cross the Christians revered. A young priest was drawn high in the air on a pulley by a rope lashed to his wrists. His body swung to and fro. Two soldiers secured him to a pillar, and close by his side they lashed the body of a maiden. The mob became frenetic.

In lulls of the hurricane of voices, fragments of psalms and

hymns pealed with a fugitive, plaintive sweetness. A band of captives, brutally maltreated, cuffed, and beaten, were driven through the *mêlée* before the spears of soldiers. They came chanting: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. . . . Lord, hear my voice. . . ." Howls of coarse laughter mocked them. "Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. . . ." Obscene words were shouted in their ears.

"If Thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Rendered unconscious by a blow, one fell senseless into the arms of a soldier. Scrawny hands writhed towards him. He was dragged from the soldier into the maws of the mob and trampled upon. His limbs were broken. Their faces raised to the sky, the others lifted their plangent supplication to the Supreme Mystery there. . . .

"My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning——" Their voices, under blows, rose with a majestical musical jubilation—"I say, more than they that watch for the morning. . . ."

Their eyes burned. There was no doubt in their hearts that beyond the blue cerulean One came softly downward on invisible stairs of light; that His arms were welcomingly extended, and that thronging the lily-strewn pathway of the stars were hosts of angels bearing martyrs' crowns. There was nothing inexplicable in these men's bravery; they had little fear of torture. For theirs was indeed the only ultimate triumph of mortality—the triumph of all messiahs, of all crosses. Theirs the victory beyond any achievement of the world—aye, the very victory of self-immolation for an ideal, whatever it be, which transcends all realities of life.

Gazing upon the monk who had been first offered up, Mary paused suddenly as she crossed the temple terrace. Bowed to his breast as a wilted flower, the monk's countenance was composed in a resigned tranquillity; his eyes, opening wearily, beamed with the dim light of dreams; his very skin seemed luminous. His lips framed a smile as sweet as a child's. Through Mary's heart shot a pang of mingled amazement, awed wonder, and chagrin.



"By the gods," she muttered, clenching her hands, "yon fanatic seemeth to taste some secret bliss! He dieth with a smile upon his lips. His eyes might be dreaming upon the face of some woman he loved! By the high Serapis, this dog, deluded or mad, seemeth happy! Holy gods, is it that fools alone can know content and peace upon the earth?" She paused a moment, troubled and disquieted.

Pulsing through the clamor, Mary hearkened to the faintly resurgent sweetness of the psalms and Christian antiphons, sung in Greek and Latin. There was something hauntingly tantalizing and vexing in the melodic uplift of these martyrs going singing to their death. Tender and swellingly clear the soprano voice of a lad, scarcely more than a boy, rose above those of his brethren—

O path where Christ has trod,  
O Way that leads to God,  
O Word abiding!  
O Endless Light on high,  
Mercy's fresh springing flood,  
Worker of all things good,  
O glorious Life!  
Christ Jesus hear! \*

The noonday sun burned in a zenith of liquid sapphire. Above the areas where the homes of the Christians had been fired heavy smoke hung. The horizon was obscured by low-lying mists. The sound of the rioters, inflamed and unappeased, might have been that of some unearthly menagerie filled with all the monsters of the genii-world of the Arabians.

The Christians were fortifying themselves in churches, and seeking refuge in strong buildings and hidden retreats. Arming themselves, they joined in bands and fought when attacked. This had only the effect of increasing their enemies' fury. On the way to the Serapium many were torn limb from limb.

On the face of the gleaming purple colossi supporting the pediments of the Serapium the number of victims had appallingly increased. Naked, exposed in the glare of the white-

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\* Part of one of the earliest known Christian hymns, composed by Clement of Alexandria, found at the conclusion of his "Ethical Guide to Life." These hymns, written in Greek, and widely used in the early Eastern Church, were sung in the Anacreontic metre.

hot sun, their arms extended in the manner of those nailed to the cross and lashed with ropes and chains, were exquisite youths, supple-limbed, their bodies sheeny as the lustre of lilies in the vigorous pride of their fresh manhood; monks with long beards, whose bodies, wasted by privation, showed hideous self-mutilations and loathsome sores; priests, their eyes flashing a proud contempt of their tormentors, some with manes of hair gray and patriarchal with age; slaves, gigantic blacks. In contrast to the lithe and delicious limbs of the young, there were stretched taut the withered bodies of the aged from which all life seemed sapped and scorched, yet in whose eyes blazed an intense vitality. Thronging about the pillars, soldiers, temple attendants, and citizens alike engaged in the torture of the victims. Mary moved to and fro, stern, insatiate, implacable, directing, spurring, and inciting them in their dreadful work.

Mingling with the Alexandrians were hordes of Jews from the northeastern quarter. Redolent of filth and garlic, old Hebrews with long beards went, howling execrations, about the Serapium, giving vent to their long-cherished rancor against the Christians for the pillaging of their synagogues. Pausing before the pillars, they spat upon the crucified and buffeted and clawed their bodies with their scrawny hands. Old Jewish crones, with moth-eaten hair, wearing huge rings in their ears, tottered to and fro, whining insults and curses, exulting in their enemies' torment. They were ragged, unsavory creatures.

Applying grisly instruments of torture, soldiers wrenched the limbs of the martyrs. They broke their arms and legs. Others they taunted with the points of spears. Many were mutilated with knives, their cheeks slit, their ears cut off, their tongues cleaved by the root from their mouths.

"Abjure Christ! Worship Serapis! Deny the Cross and be saved!"

The sun rolled hotly from the zenith. The noon hour passed with an increase in the intolerable heat. The air was saltily pungent with the exhalation of shed blood.

And still, steadily, up the temple steps were driven never-ending herds of victims. Offered salvers of flowers before the entrance, the Christians answered only:

"We believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, in whom alone is salvation."

Under excruciating torment, the martyrs indefatigably prayed or raised their voices in song. In the coma preceding death, the faces of many who fainted from suffering framed an expectant, ineffable beatitude. Their courage, their undaunted stoicism, was truly marvellous. The triumph of their faith over physical anguish, the apparent obliviousness of many to their tormentors, drove Mary to an increasing pitch of baffled chagrin. Even the features of the dead reflected the ecstasy of golden visions. Dying, the monks prophesied, the priests besought vengeance upon the city. Slaves, under torture, reviled Mary when she passed. Rage filled her. A monk, as a spear entered his breast, shouted an insult. Nearby, a youth raised his eyes to the sun-burning skies. "Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them be turned back, and be ashamed very speedily." Mary, incensed, believed he was mocking her.

"Your whips! Your scorpions! Your spears! Are ye suddenly palsied? Soldiers! Men of Alexandria! Let the dogs suffer! Flog them! Break their limbs! They mock us! Tear out their tongues! By the gods, they jeer at us!"

From a soldier Mary seized a scorpion-rod, its leather lashes studded at the ends with bits of sharp metal. Infuriated, she lifted it. With a sickening sound the whips wrapped themselves about the youth's limbs. From wounds in the thighs blood exuded in great ruby drops and trickled to the stones. Beholding her wielding with terrific vigor the whip, wild hysteric applause went up from the mob. Again and again she lifted the scourge. This intimate sense of inflicting pain upon one whose faith she hated, the sight of the whip-wounds like adder kisses on the youth's limbs, intoxicated Mary to fiercer and fiercer fury. Mary felt the youth's body recoil and bound beneath the stinging, gripping antennæ of the lashes; she could feel each muscular contortion of pain. And her nostrils dilated with joy, her pulses leaped, her nerves tingled. As the boy's strength ebbed beneath the sapping caresses of the scourge, as the sovereign happiness of confident faith vanished from his face, Mary's brain crimsoned. Suddenly the youth's

body relaxed and he passed into a swoon. Mary seemed lifted from the earth in an acme of transport; in her mouth was the mingled sweet-bitter savor of aloes and honey. She seemed to float in an atmosphere of many colors.

"Soldiers! Guards!" she shouted. "Can we not make these dogs suffer? The fires!—the fires! Bring the torches! Light the pyres!"

To one of the pillars had been lashed a young neophyte—a lad slim and delicate, whose blue eyes, fringed with golden lashes, were raised in rapt ecstasy to heaven. The sunlight, enmeshed in his soft golden hair, spread a nimbus about his fair head.

Obedying Mary's call, the soldiers applied torches to the pyres. A thin thread of smoke encircled the child. As the darting tongues lapped his feet the boy's body writhed, then bravely he opened his lips and his voice rose as a fountain of sheer, sweet melody:

O come, thou Father of the poor,  
O come, Thou Source of all our store,  
Come, fill our hearts with love!

The dying listened, entranced, believing they heard an angel singing. On the terrace the babel subsided. The flames crackled and hissed. Tongues of fire leaped up the pillars.

Suddenly bereft of strength, stricken by the undaunted bravery of this child who sang amid the flames, Mary fell back against the bronze-plated walls of the temple. The bloody whip dropped from her inert hands. She panted, exhausted, dizzy. From the pillars the faces of the dead and dying inexorably mocked her with the unconquerable triumph of the faith that never falters, the courage that knows no defeat. Mary saw the hungry flames devouring the boy's limbs—a pang of pity and horror gripped her. Dying, his voice deliciously, caressively pulsed in an expiring plaint—softly appealing, baffling, plangently sweet:

Grant us in life Thy saving grace,  
Grant us in death to see Thy face,  
And endless joy inherit.

Clouds of smoke swelled across the front of the Serapium. Driven from their shelter in the temple architraves, swarms of

doves circled the pillars. Out of the smoke and flame sharp, yelping cries and yells of agony rent the air. Unnoticed amid the excited mob, intent in gloating upon the suffering of those perishing in the fires, a dozen monks, their clothing torn, their bare legs and feet bleeding, were driven up the steps. The leader furiously thrust aside the proffered sacrificial offerings to Serapis, and lifted his voice in ominous prophecy:

*"They worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast . . . and it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. . . . If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."*

He was splendid in his prophetic inspiration. Never had Mary, among all the strange men she had known, seen one so austere beautiful, so impassionedly noble in mien. The face of the monk was that of a stern Hermes, beardless, Grecian in outline. His great eyes flamed like wells of fire. About his low brow black ringlets clustered like clinging ivy leaves. His lips were red despite their fastings. Mary's heart stirred. Her hands closed and unclosed spasmodically. The monks treated the leader with awed veneration. From those crucified to the pillars cries arose:

"Niobides! Niobides! Pray for us!"

"By the gods, yon zealot is handsome—who is he?"

A young Roman, who held a minor political office in the city, standing by Mary, replied:

"The most famed monk in all Egypt. Since Anthony there has been no such powerful leader among the madmen of the desert. Methinks he is a Greek, and was a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage. 'Tis said he performs miracles, and is worshipped as a god. Myself I think he is the master of some crude form of thaumaturgy. The lame, sick, blind, and dumb make pilgrimages unto the desert. 'Tis said they kiss the ground whereon he walketh. His community in Nitria numbereth two thousand. When they march through the desert praying it is as with the sound of storm winds. Surely thou hast heard of him! 'Tis he who of late years hath led raids

by night, with his madmen, upon the quarters of the Arians, killing them and setting their houses afire! He hath borne into the quarters of the Jews, scattering the Israelites, destroying their booths, and demolishing their synagogues. The legionaries have often gone forth to restore order, but have never captured his bands. The Christians believe he hath the power of rising in midair and returning to the desert. A sort of Christian Mercury! 'Tis said he hath power over the cenobites of the desert as great as Theophilus hath over his *polloi* in Alexandria."

"Ah!" Mary gasped, her eyes dilating.

The monk, with scornful indifference, permitted the soldiers to disrobe him. He suffered their blows without reproach.

Lifted in the arms of soldiers, who mounted ladders, he was lashed to a pillar. Unlike the mutilated bodies of the flagellants, his skin was white, luminous with the fervency of an interior spirit.

"They say Niobides is himself virginal," laughed the Roman. "I believe in the virginity of nothing, neither of monks nor trees, women nor plants."

"Thou art corrupted with Rome," smiled Mary.

"Nay, with Alexandria," retorted the Roman.

"By the gods, he is beautiful!" breathed Mary, clasping her hands, gazing enrapt. "Beautiful is he as the child of Isis!"

The Roman replied, not without malice:

"'Tis said yon fanatic hath not been miserly in his compliments to thee, most beautiful of the Graces! A violent, bitter-tongued rascal! Heardst thou not that, a fortnight since, his monks attacked the home of Justina, the courtesan, and set fire to it? It was discovered not too soon, and the legionaries sent his band scurrying. By the gods, he preacheth of a hades that maketh one's throat crack!"

"Methinks I have heard of him," said Mary, vaguely. "Strange, he is so mad and withal as fair looking as the child of Venus and Hermes!"

From his high place the monk's blasting gaze turned on Mary.

"Woman of Babylon! Mistress of abominations!" His

voice rang out like a blaring trumpet above the demoniac din. "Woe unto thee that thou hast given thyself to the pleasures of the earth, which pass as the clouds, and to the riches of the earth, which are dissolved as smoke! Thou hast given thyself to the vanities of the earth and the foulness of lusts; thou hast forfeited the life everlasting for an eternal death. The cup thou hast filled shall be filled to thee double! The fruits wherefor thy soul lusted shall depart from thee, and all things which are dainty and goodly shall depart from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all!"

"Thou hearest," sneered the Roman, "his compliments somewhat lack in courtesy!"

"He delighteth me!" exclaimed Mary fiercely. "By the divine Aphrodite, I would master him!"

Closing his eyes, the monk prayed in silence. A legionary lifted a spear.

Suddenly Mary rushed forward and imperatively raised her arm.

"Hold! Let all be sacrificed! Let the death of all avenge the insult to Mithra! But spare this madman for Aphrodite! Give him unto me! He revileth love! Yea, he breathes fulsome insults upon me! Ah, I would subjugate him! I would avenge myself upon him! Worst him! Subdue him! Then have him die! Lift him down! Gods! Gods! To undo him! To break him! Yea, for his insults, I alone shall punish him. Give him unto me! As flesh is not tortured in flame, so shall I torture him!" She clapped her hands and laughed abandonedly. The captain of the guards shouted:

"Down with him! A sacrifice to Aphrodite! Off with him! Give him unto Mary!" The captain laughed with ribald mirth.

Four soldiers unlashd Niobides. Mary stood in rigid expectance before the pillar, her eyes agleam. When the monk's feet touched the stones, his head dropped, his cheeks crimsoned. He covered his eyes with his hands. In the desert Niobides had struggled with terrible temptations, and, with the example of the blessed Anthony before him, had intrepidly faced and conquered demons. Into Alexandria he had fearlessly led his monks, denouncing the city for its sins, and lead-

ing raids. Niobides had never known fear. On the pillar he was prepared to meet death unflinchingly. Saved, for what purpose he knew not, naked, conscious of the bold gaze of the bedizened women, conscious of Mary, beautiful in her notorious iniquity, her eyes avidly devouring him, exposed amid the jeering crowd, Niobides's courage left him, and he was overcome by shame and abashed confusion. Moving forward, Mary laid her hand upon his naked arm.

"Thou shalt go to my house!" She laughed in sardonic triumph. "There thou shalt await me! I have saved thee from death! For I would have thee tell me of this life eternal thou sayest with such certainty I have forfeited!"

His ears became scarlet. Mary felt his body quaking with terror.

"Let me die!" he gasped, cringing.

Over him the soldiers slipped a haircloth garment.

Surrounded by guards, his face hidden in his hands, he was led away.



## VI

TOWARDS the climax of that grisly orgy, late in the afternoon, Mary stood on the eminence of the sanctuary before the towering idol.

Within the temple a bluish penumbra prevailed. The endless rows of massive columns, supporting the arches spanning the prodigious roof, were lost in thick volumes of billowing smoke, wafted through the doorway from the pyres on the terrace without. On the black plinths hung the dreadful fruit of the massacre—hundreds of stark bodies, their heads drooping, dim, white, blood-stained blurs in the sepulchral obscurity. The air was acrid with the bitter odor of charred flesh.

Through the swirling mists, from the orifice in the roof, poured a gleaming shaft of sunlight, haloing the god. Looming titanically almost to the apex of the sanctuary, the awesome image of Serapis stretched out voracious arms over the turbulent horde glutting the edifice. Long since the blood-drunk mob, in a mounting dementia, fed and aggravated by the never-ending herds of victims captured by skirmishing bands throughout the city, had surged up over the terrace, and, driving the legionaries before it, had carried the slaughter into the very precincts of the temple. The serpent entwining the animal heads on the idol's breast, with its coat of opalescent gems, undulated visibly. The grotesque visage gloated monstrously. The agate eyes leered with the reflected blood-rapacity of its devotees. The jewelled lips twisted with pleasurable relish in the horrible savor of incinerated bodies.

In the middle of the temple, piled high above the heads of the rabble, mounted a pyramid of human corpses ruthlessly heaped together—the charred and mangled fragments of the earlier victims that had been torn down from the pillars without and dragged with flesh-hooks into the temple for the delectation of the god. From the gruesome holocaust, swelling higher and higher, stared with glazed, unseeing eyes the livid faces of countless dead. Stark and rigid protruded the arms

and pointing hands of those who had died for Christ. It seemed that even in death these martyrs lifted their arms in some signal triumph, denying defeat and mocking, with dumb prophecies of doom, the pagan god.

The steps of the sanctuary were slippery with mucous pools of blood.

Never had Serapis been offered such a sacrifice. The outraged Mithra was avenged.

Above that weltering heap, priestess of that feast of death, evilly splendid and baleful still, bathed in the iridescent shimmer and sheen reflected from the begemmed coat of the divinity, Mary, blood-sated, sluggish, wearied to exhaustion, leaned listlessly against the altar behind her. Motionless, sombre in her black draperies, the silver and pearl figures of the Zodiac respired in the changing light. Her diamond diadem, her jewelled arms and hands, fierily ignited and shot a quivering nimbus about her. In the semi-twilight her green eyes, half-closed, glowed sullenly, dully.

Far down the nave of the temple a group of soldiers fought their way through the maniacal throng toward the high altar, bearing in their midst a chained captive—an aged man of gigantic stature who struggled violently. Although he was securely manacled, the utmost exertion was required to handle him. Stubbornly resisting approach to the sanctuary, he felled with a blow of his chained fists one of his captors. With spears and bludgeons, legionaries and citizens rushed to the assistance of his guards. As he was thrust in full view of the idol, he lifted a hoarse, guttural voice, deep as a lion's bay, and bawled curses upon the pagan god, upon Alexandria the city of sin, upon all who persecuted the Christians. He was a great hulk of a man with huge gnarled arms the muscles of which twisted beneath the skin like the contortions of a snake. His face, hideously disfigured, with the mouth slit across the cheeks, the ears cut off, and a ring in the lobes of his nose, was frightsome in its ogre-ferocity. His gray hair tossed about his head like a shaggy mane. His eyes glowered with impotent rage.

Reclining listlessly, weariedly sated, sluggish, against the altar, Mary heard the giant's voice reverberating through the pandemonium. Galvanized, the sombre, inert figure in its sable draperies stiffened suddenly into rigid life. Mary's heart gave a tumultuous thud. Her dilated eyes fixed, with the stealthy, sinuous movement of the tigress stalking its prey, Mary glided forward to the verge of the elevated platform of the sanctuary on which the altar stood. Even as she paused, her sable, sinister, jewel-embazoned figure dominating the temple, the enraged soldiers struck down the captive colossus on the blood-stained mosaic pavement at her feet.

Mary recognized her father.

"At last, at last we meet, my father, after all the years!" Her voice hissed out in sudden stinging hate. Her hands spasmodically clenched the air with the grasping stark hunger for vengeance long delayed, as, with panting bosom, she muttered tensely: "Oh, kind gods, oh, sweet gods of Egypt, long is your endurance, but inexorable your justice! Serapis, god of life, who causest the waters to rise and bringest the yearly inundation of the Nile, thou who quickenest the earth in spring, and who makest fertile fields of wheat! God of the running waters! God of the rains and fountains! Now thou bringest unto retribution him who defiled her, my mother, as she lay dead, her who was true to Isis, the divine one, mistress of the elements, beginning of the ages! Aye, him, the dog who flogged his child and drove her upon the streets—him, my father, thou hast brought to thy knees and my knees, at last, O Serapis, thou holy one! Inevitable are thy workings, ineffable thy wisdom! Oh, god of the seasons, celestial minister of justice, give unto me to drink the sacramental cup of thy holy wrath!"

Half-stunned, Luke gazed up with terrorized incredulity upon the inflamed Erinys, bespangled in spitfire jewels, upon the eminence of the shrine. Recoiling with recognition and horror, he struggled slowly to his full height. He was splendid in his savage, rugged strength. He wore but the skin of a wild animal about his loins. The years had left no marks upon him save the graying of his unkempt hair. His mighty frame

shook as a gnarled tree in a storm. The knotty veins in his arms distended, the pulses in his neck and temples throbbed. Lifting his arm, he made a sudden leap toward Mary as if to smite her, but the alert soldiers, thrusting out their spears, held him at bay, the sharp points piercing his skin. Cleaving the air with his fists, Luke bellowed:

“Bride of the beast! Upon thy forehead is written, ‘Mystery, Babylon, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth!’ Thou art drunk with the blood of the martyrs and the blood of the saints!”

His mouth grimaced horribly. His voice, rumbling through the uproar, by its terrible vehemence, gave pause to the murderous throng. Beholding Mary violently assailed by the half-naked Hercules, they desisted in their work of torment and listened agape. “Thou necropolis! Thou whited sepulchre! Thou habitation of devils! Thou cage of every foul bird! Woe unto the loins that generated thee! Woe unto the womb that gave thee forth! Woe unto me that I am thy father! Before these saints who die at thy hand, I repudiate thee! Before these holy martyrs whose blood thou drinkest, I abominate thee and give thee unto perdition!”

Raising his eyes heavenward, his uplifted, chained hands clasped in prayer, he groaned:

“God of Isaac! God of Jacob! God of Abraham! Thou who didst send Thine only Son to redeem the world! Thus are Thy judgments come upon me for the sins of my youth! Almighty God, why hast Thou afflicted upon me this daughter of hell? Have I not already atoned for mine iniquities, that Thou shouldst confront me in my old age with this plague of harlotries? Have I not done Thy will? Have I not spread Thy Word? Now am I shamed before those who die for Thee! Judge me, O God, if in aught I had to do with her filthiness! As a child I brought her unto Thee and she refused Thy baptismal grace! As a child she belonged to Satan and gave herself to the powers of darkness! Yea, when she brought the stench of her impurities into my house, did I not cast her from me? Did I not obey Thy will as spoken by Paul: ‘Be ye not yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness!’

Before Thee, O God, I repudiate her! Let her sins be not weighed against me, O Lord. Thou art a just God! Even as I cast her forth and the lusts of her childhood, so do I now, Lord God of hosts, spew her from me as vomit! Thy curse and my curse blight and wither her!"

As Luke's fulmination resounded through the pillared, echoing nave, gradually the swarming crowd, desisting from its labors of torture, pressed closer against the semicircular cordon of legionaries surrounding the open space before the sanctuary. Above them Mary's face blanched to a livid whiteness, her eyes reddened like bleeding stars. She stood motionless. Abruptly her lips parted.

"Chain him!" she commanded, in a cold, dead, passionless voice.

Legionaries seized him. Luke resisted, beating away the guards with his fists. One of the soldiers struck him a mighty blow with a spear-butt, and, half stunned, he fell forward on his knees. Quickly his heavy limbs were wrapped with chains.

"Strip him!" said Mary, with grim-set lips.

A wail of shame burst from the giant. Cowering, he drew his fists up before his eyes as his garment of skin was ripped from him.

"Lash him to yonder column!" the frigid voice commanded again, as Mary pointed to a plinth on the right of the sanctuary. "Let Serapis behold so desirable a sacrifice."

Luke's massive body leaped and twisted as the soldiers dragged him to the pillar and bound him, his hands lashed above his head, his feet clear of the pavement. His voice ranted maledictions with the roaring gutturance of a lion's bay.

"May plagues come upon thee, and desolation, and mourning, and famine, thou sewer of the world, thou daughter of Babylon!"

Sweeping down the steps of the sanctuary with gaunt majesty, Mary ordered the soldiers in a sharp staccato voice:

"Bring the whips! Flog the dog!"

Long whips like snakes leaped through the air and smote the freedman's flesh. The leather lashes, studded with metal prongs, slickered and thrashed about his knotty limbs.

"Lord God! Deliver me! Have I not been faithful? St. Eustatius! St. Cadocus! Anthony! Maro! Armogastes! O ye holy martyrs, give unto me the crown of death!"

His great jaw trembled. His mouth yawed hideously. His lips purpled. His disfigured face convulsed. His body twisted and writhed. The tendons of his limbs stiffened. In contrast to the stoic calm of the other martyrs, Luke cringed beneath the lash. Addicted to barbarous brutalities in his raids upon the Arians, Luke, in common with men of great physical bulk, himself recoiled from physical anguish. A slave, exulting himself in cruelty, he had an innate terror of punishment. Each stroke of the whip evoked the coward, cringing fear of the days of his youth when the slave-masters had marked his body and face.

Down the cleared space Mary strode to the pillar. Lifting her arm peremptorily, she stayed the soldiers' hands. Their whips fell. Gazing with cold grimness at her father's pain-contorted countenance, moving close, she said with biting sweetness, in a low, honeyed tone:

"Dost thou remember the night thou didst drag me to thy festering tombs? Dost thou remember how thou didst flog me again when I loved? Thou wert given to much ranting concerning thy heavenly justice: our gods give the justice which is terrestrial." Stepping closer, she peered, with a mordant smile, into his face. "Ah, thou wert once fond of the whip, gentle father. Such seemeth a Christian father's way of teaching a child tenderness and love. Perchance children may sometimes teach their sires somewhat of justice. Is not the whip sweet?"

He opened his mouth:

"Daughter of Sodom! Woman of Babylon——"

She whirled about to the soldiers, her voice coarsening to a raucous virago snarl:

"*Give me the whip*—your arms lack strength it seemeth! By the gods, are ye weak? You have not had Christian fathers, soldiers! Perchance from what I learned from mine as a child I may teach somewhat to you!"

She seized a scourge and lifted it, deliberately gazing into her father's face. A gasp arose from the close-packed crowd,

all watchful. Swinging her arm, Mary's whip split the air. She seemed to possess the strength of ten men. The scourge snarled and snapped and hissed. It seemed instinct with life, vindictive, virulent. The lashes coiled and curled and leaped and stung like vipers. With infuriated vigor Mary applied the rod, drawing back a step and leaping forward each time the whip descended. The jewelled chain suspended from her right wrist to her anklet broke. She seemed insatiate, tireless. Luke screamed the name of God and yelped appeals for mercy. In the vast temple could be heard only the snap and snarl of the dreadful whips and the martyr's outcries. The great hulk of a body, heaving agonizedly in its chains, beat with heavy thuds against the pillar. The studded lashes cut the freed-man's face, blindingly smote his eyes, and lacerated the lids. They tore his lips like talons. His face ran with perspiration and blood; blood matted his hair; a pool of blood widened on the pavement beneath his feet. Beneath the merciless, relentless, blistering whips, in sheer agony, Luke's voice broke to a whine.

Panting for breath, Mary dropped the scourge. She drew away. Her eyes gloated with envenomed zest upon the gaping wounds. Through the hush in the vast fane the feeble voice of a dying martyr chanted:

"Deliver me from my transgressors. . . . Remove Thy stroke away from me. I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand."

A low gasp arose from the foremost ranks of the watching crowd. Mary, tense, cold, calm, not an eyelash quivering, not a muscle of her face moving, observed the writhing body pounding on the pillar, the twisting mouth, the blood-weeping eyes. Gradually the struggling body relaxed, the broken whines died in sobbing sighs. Over Mary's face passed the spectre of a smile.

"Perchance the taste of steel is sweet," said Mary, sibilantly. "Often, as a child, I washed the stains of blood from the garments of yon saint, my pious father. He found joy in wielding maces upon those who believed not as he. Inasmuch as we are about to permit him to leave the earth, let him go hence even as he sent others. Let him die—but not

too swiftly. Give him time, as the gods are gracious, to reconsider the past and learn of justice. He should, perforce, be permitted to contemplate his transition to the vulgar heaven of his carpenter—but with not too pleasurable leisure.” Raising her hand imperiously, she called: “Soldiers, come hither! Ye are skilled in such business. Your spears! But touch him—softly!”

The spears of seven were promptly raised. The fine points touched the aged man’s breast. Mary saw the nerves quivering beneath the skin. A sombre smile deepened about her mouth.

Tantalizingly the spear-points pricked the skin of the man’s breast in the region of the heart. Drops of blood softly exuded. His body heaved spasmodically. The chains rattled from his nervous trembling against the stone column. Luke vehemently, desperately prayed.

“Gently,” murmured Mary, in a crooning tone, drawing near, “I pray of you, very gently. . . .”

Reaching forth her hand, she stayed a soldier’s arm.

“Be not in haste, zealous guardian of the city’s peace. I have bided long for this requitement! I say to you, gently!”

With restraining eagerness, Mary tightly grasped the soldier’s wrist, and with her own hand guided the weapon, detaining the soldier’s arm so that the lance might not abruptly pierce the martyr’s chest. Through the wrist grasping the spear rod, Mary could feel the leaping pulsations of her father’s heart, the nervous tremor of his great body in its resistance to torture. Her bosom rose and fell, her pulses pounded. Her eyelids once or twice drooped swooningly.

“Gently,” she breathed, scarce above a whisper. “Very, very . . . gently!”

Watching her face and following her example, the six other legionaries tortured Luke with the slow play of their spears.

Unloosing her hand from the legionary’s wrist, her arm still rigidly outstretched, Mary, stepping back a pace, directed the spears by a calm, deliberate, slow movement of her diamonded forefinger. Luke’s body shuddered in fierce recoil as the spears again and again penetrated slowly toward the heart. The muscles contorted like snakes beneath the bronzed



skin. Her hand still outstretched, her jewelled fingers moving like glittering-scaled antennæ, her gaze never wavering from the distorted face, Mary withdrew slowly, steadily, stealthily backward to the lowest step of the sanctuary. There, stonily watching, she stood.

Suddenly the awful strained silence was broken. One of the young legionaries torturing Luke, his face yellow with the sickness of horror, gasped :

“Gods! Gods! This woman is a fiend!”

From his nerveless hand the spear fell on the pavement with a ringing clash.

Luke's body spasmed, his head jerked up, a long, blood-choked sigh gurgled from his throat. His bleeding eyes rolled piteously, and through the crimson film the dying man saw Mary his daughter . . . and fear grew cold in his heart, fear and terror at the sight of this woman, his daughter, gazing stonily upon him with ruthless, cold, impassive hate.

Abruptly Mary dropped her arm. The six other soldiers, sighing with relief, withdrew their spears. All turned away their heads. From the breathless, spellbound multitude wafted an almost inaudible moan. spurts of blood gushed from the seven wounds in the martyr's body; streams of crimson trailed over his limbs. The face of the freedman blanched, the nervous dilation of the lobes of the nose subsided, the lips became blue. Drops of cold sweat gleamed on the body, which suddenly stiffened. The head fell forward on the breast.

Huddled near the side of the altar, a group of heteræ crouched together, pale and staring with terror.

“She is monstrous,” whispered one.

“Rememberest thou a youth not five months ago was found dead in her house?”

A third fell forward on her face. From her lips burst a thin, stifled scream.

Slowly Mary turned. With arms upraised, her face uplifted to the gory sentient visage of the god, magnificently aflame in his jewelled coat fired by the light of the descending sun, with the slow solemnity of a celebrant she mounted the steps of the altar. She prayed:

“Oh sweet god, inexorable and just! Serapis, judge of

the souls of men, the purple wine of thy wrath and trembling easeth the fever of hate in my veins! Oh mighty god, I thank thee! Thou art truly gracious unto those who worship thee! I bow in gratitude unto thee! For retribution hath been wrought, justice hath been done. Rejoice with me, oh cool and perfumed winds of sunny seas! Oh rains that quench the summer drought! Oh Nile that riseth to bring fair harvests to the earth! Oh running rivers, pleasant streams, rejoice with me! Oh breathing world! Oh sun! Oh moon! Oh stars! Exult with me! All that is! Darkness and light! Living and dead! Rejoice, rejoice with me! Sweet are the dews of morn! Delicious the odors of evening flowers! Reviving cool waters in the desert heat! Delectable are kisses, cups of milk, and the dripping combs of bees! But naught is there in life or death so sweet as vengeance long delayed! Cup of the gods, wine of your awful fury, I drink deep! My heart singeth as the nightingale! Honey distills within my veins!" Her tall figure swayed forward in royal obeisance. "Oh holy Serapis, celestial god of Egypt, god of day and god of night, I bow in gratitude unto thee. Accept my rejoicing as incense to thy majesty."

From the massed rioters of the massacre, gripped by the fervor of Mary's prayer, came the murmur as of a sacrificial antiphon. Exalted, inspired, she wheeled about and with a superb gesture of her outflung right arm swayed and thrilled the vast breathless assemblage.

"Men of Alexandria, this man is my father." Her voice, clear, resonant, belled with a dilating musical jubilation through the vast temple, the echoing vaults, and far subterranean naves. Her hand, with derisive scorn, speared the air toward the broken figure of Luke sagging on the pillar. "For long and bitter years have I suffered this man's memory! For long and bitter years have I prayed unto Serapis to bring him to my feet! Often have I lost faith in the gods, in him who ruleth the heavens and judgeth the dead, Serapis the inexorable one. Now do I know his wisdom is almighty, infallible, his justice unfailing, inscrutable! Long is his arm, patient his purpose! Certain in his works as the movement of the tide, the revolution of the stars! Men of Alexandria, you have

seen this man brought to my feet. Hear me! When I was a child he tried to force me into his vile creed. Because I resisted initiation into this superstition of slaves, I was flogged! He was my father—yet his only kisses were those of the scourge!”

Her hand dropped to her side.

“I knew no tenderness save from my mother—her I loved. She was beautiful, she was tender, she worshipped the true gods. For these things this man hated her. When my mother died this jackal spat upon her face. Hear me! I hated him within my child’s soul that hour! I longed to spit into his face mine own heart’s contempt! That was many years ago.

“In the days of my girlhood love came to me. Into my empty heart there came to nest the soft doves of Aphrodite! Out of the empty vase of my body bloomed the flowers of Paphos! My dumb soul became a harp, my spirit sang. My blind girl’s eyes were opened to the glory of the world; I drank in perfumed breezes; I saw multi-colored wonders through the thousand eyes of all the stars; I was queen of the silver moon in the arms of one fair as Endymion. Mine was the rapture of Psyche and of Eurydice whom Orpheus loved. I learned then, oh people, to love beauty and to love love! I was innocent of wrong! I was tender, I knew no bitterness of heart. But my soul hath been poisoned since; it hath been corroded with vinegar and hemlock; serpents have nested within the heart where once cooed only the soft doves of the Cyprian. Harken unto me! These dogs have made love an opprobrious thing. They have besmirched the white beauty of Aphrodite with the mire of their own concupiscence! They have made man and woman, created for beauty and love, creatures of ignominy, clothed in the shame of their vile imagining! The body they have made accursed and the fruits of love they have changed to bitter apples that fester the lips! The dream of the poets, the lore of the sages, they have perverted; and that thing most divine, most partaking of the nature of the gods, whereby we are translated and inspired with holy enthusiasms—yea, love itself, that which fecundates the earth and populates the nations, they have made heinous and contemptuous.

“Because I loved, because I gave myself to her, the

Blessed One, whose sweet breath shall ever waft to felicitous harbors the white galleons of the world, whose tender lips shall ever stir to rapture trees and flowers on tender nights of spring, whose beauty shall ever haunt the dreams of men, yea, though her name be forgotten—because I heard the cooing of the doves of her, Aphrodite, the Immortal One, this man flogged me!”

Mary paused. A deep sigh, like wind among sea-grasses, soughed through the temple. Far down the nave a woman wept softly.

“Hear me further, oh people! Methinks we have meted to these dogs but what they have meted. We have been witness of their bloody riots, their ruthless killings. For me have I only repaid hatred with hatred, contempt with contempt, flogging with flogging. Because I gave myself to beauty and to love I was abused with shame and contumely. A child, I was shown no pity. I was dragged into the street. I was stoned. But the wounds of their stones were not such as the wounds of their words.” Her arms went out in a gesture of appeal. “Till then I knew not there were in the world words so foul. Till then I knew not that of human affection men could make so shameful a thing. Thus was I driven upon the streets of Alexandria—perchance there are some of you who know what such a life means, and to a child.”

She spoke more softly.

“Men of Alexandria, ye have heard this dog revile me. Ye have heard him curse me before his God for the life to which he drove me. But hear me, hear me now! Before Serapis, high god of Egypt, before all the other gods that abide in our skies, before you, people of Alexandria, I curse this man! I curse him with my mouth, I curse him with my heart, I curse him with my eyes. I curse him with every pulse of my veins! I curse him for all the horrors to which he drove me. I curse him with all the bitter hate he inspired in me. I curse him a thousand-fold to the degree that he has made love accursed! I curse the loins whence I sprung! I curse all in the body of me that partakes of him! I curse his faith as I curse all that is foul and base! Once my heart was sweet as the honey-comb of bees. What I learned of hatred

was through this man. What I learned of cruelty and deceit was through these hypocrites who canted of eternal love! Yea, they prate of their eternal love, but know no love upon the earth. By Serapis, if I have been guilty of abominations, if I have given myself to iniquities, if I have been cruel, this man hanging yonder hath wrought it all. Ah, I would there were no malice within my heart! But the malevolence of this man and his kind hath goaded my soul to hate and blackened the world with ugliness. The years of my life have fled before the sting of his whips!"

Over the dense, motionless blur of faces Mary's basilisk gaze roved slowly, finally settling upon the sodden figure of the dying Luke in a fixed stare. Then, once again, she raised her arm, her diamond fingers quivering like glittering-scaled antennæ as they pointed to the martyr. Her voice throbbed with the low, hoarse, resonant rasp of triumphant, consummated vengeance:

"Ye have heard his fulsome insults and contumelies. Ye have seen the ire of Serapis lash him into cringing silence. Ye have heard the loud-sounding curses of him who bruised the heart of childhood. Ye have seen the spears of Serapis pierce his heart. He that carried death as his word of life ye have seen delivered up to death. Into my hand, his daughter, whom he scourged, hath Serapis placed his rod. Into my hand, his daughter, unto whom he gave to drink the cup of shame, hath Serapis given the cup of wrath and death. Great is Serapis, infallible his justice, inevitable his decree! Behold!"

Her body rigid as a figure of stone, her diamonded fingers quivering, Mary scrutinized with a cold, ruthless avidness every throe of the drained, shrinking body, every tremor of the still-tortured nerves, every fluttering mark of the ebbing agony of life. She seemed scarcely to breathe. The very air was turgid with still horror. Every eye was riveted on the limp victim of the god.

For the last time, with a wild, direct stare, Luke opened his eyes.

The last vision which the aged Christian took with him into eternity must have been an appalling one.

Within the prodigious temple swirled bluish-gray shadows, vague and vast. Out of the obscurity the black plinths rose bearing the fruit of the massacre—dim whitish blurs in the smoky penumbra of the shrine. Crimsoned in the ruddy glow of the setting sun, the monolithic idol grinned loathsomely, his eyes agleam, his jewelled body scintillant with the slimy sheen of the cobra's coat. Beneath the idol stood Mary—her face spectrally white amid the drifting films of acrid vapor, upon her cheeks the carmine tint of roses, her eyelids blackened with antimony, her brows with kohl. In the reflected light of the idol the horned diadem on her head emitted eldritch flashes of blenched lightning; her trembling pointed hand blazed with satanic brilliance. Hideous in all it signified, mystic insignia of the abominations of the pagan world, upon Mary's breast throbbed, as with sentient life, the monstrous pendant, mounted as a dragon-fly in flight with wings, jewel-set, of azure. Terribly cruel and terribly sad, beautiful and blighting, she stood above that fearsome carnage as some doomed queen of fiends in a nether realm of hell.

For a long, long, tense, strained moment they gazed full upon one another, face to face, father and child. For a strained infinite moment the blood-filmed eyes of the martyr stared at her affrightedly. Then, suddenly, something snapped within the man's giant frame; some subtle change transpired within the chambers of that tortured brain. Beneath the unflinching, implacable brooding triumph in Mary's eyes, beneath their devouring, unrelenting cruelty, Luke's eyelids fluttered and drooped. When he opened them again the face of the soul that gazed from within had changed its expression. The transformation was sudden, transfiguring, magical. The terror, the condemning antagonism, the self-righteous accusation had vanished—vanished even as the storm was calmed when One lifted His gentle voice on the Sea of Galilee. Luke's lips moved. His body heaved in a concentrated effort to speak. A hemorrhage of blood filled his throat.

What impulse of final condemnation or softly-melting pity smote his heart, what final message of hate or love, of repudiation or reconciliation he might have spoken—to what in that

moment Luke, the freedman, might have given utterance, the world would never know. If he erred in his faith, if his heart was inspired with rancor and bigot pride instead of mercy and forgiving love, Luke had not erred knowingly. The fault was that of others wiser than he—of patriarchs machinating for temporal power, of priests seeking worldly victory; of the Church which, rejecting the spirit of Christ, formulated into its creed the pharisaism, religious intolerance, and the haughty bigotry of the world-dominating Paul. Luke was only one of millions of unknowing men whom the Church has ever swayed by prejudice rather than reason, by fanaticism rather than spiritual enlightenment, by sectarian hate rather than love—only one of countless generations who have raged down the ways of the world since, carrying the Gospel amid persecutions, fighting the wars of religion, and flaunting the Cross of mercy sacrilegiously before armies, over fields of blood.

What final understanding came to Luke's soul as it stood upon the threshold of the world everlasting, what understanding of the wrong of all intolerance, of all human chastisement, of all unforgiving hardness, what comprehension of that Divine Love which knows not in all the ages aught of condemnation, which is all-forgiving because all-knowing; what, in that moment, when perchance he faced his God, Luke's lips struggled to utter, what last words of love that might have enlightened her soul and softened her heart, Mary of Alexandria was never to know.

The great eyes rolled piteously, dumbly, beseechingly. With wild pathos, with a wild awakened hunger of the spirit, with a haunting, fearful yearning, the dying man's eyes in one glance encompassed, devoured, the unyielding bitter woman. Then they closed forever. And softly, like pearls, tears trickled gently from beneath the fallen lids.

Luke breathed no more.

Then Mary slowly and deliberately descended the steps of the altar, slowly and deliberately crossed the pavement until she stood immediately before the pillar whereon her father's body hung. Then, slowly and deliberately lifting her head, without a trace of emotion, she spat full into the face of the dead.

From far down the rear of the temple, riving the taut, tense, tortured silence, floated the tremulous song of a dying youth in last appeal, . . . piercingly yearning, plan- gently sweet.

Grant us in life Thy saving grace,  
Grant us in death to see Thy face,  
And endless joy inherit.

Staggering back, her dazed eyes fastened upon the tranquil face of the dead, at last unreproachful, at last uncondemning, at last softened as it were by some tender after-death revelation, Mary threw her arm across her face. With a low, shud- dering cry she cowered back, back—back to the steps of the altar. There she crumpled into a heap, her outstretched jewelled arms and hands murkily struggling against a name- less, overwhelming horror. Her haunted eyes roved, glaring, about the temple. Her livid, painted face worked frightsomenely. Through her twisted lips came the fierce muttered words, her voice choking with its own dismayed, despairing anguish—

“Endless joy . . . endless joy . . . what joy, oh gods, oh implacable gods, is there in life?—what joy is there in love?—what joy is there in hate?—what joy is there in vengeance? Serapis! Isis! Aphrodite! Oh pitiless gods, answer me! Answer me! What joy is there in all the uni- verse?” Her desperate, impotent hands swept the pillars, and her voice wailed to a harrowing shriek—“What joy—what joy . . . is . . . there . . . for these . . . in . . . death? . . .”

Stricken with panic-terror, recoiling in a wave of hysteric revulsion, the great crowd stampeded from the temple. Even the legionaries, blindly fighting their way through the strug- gling jam at the exits, fled from the horrific figure of that woman.

Alone, beneath the blazoned, unanswering god, in that gloom-enshrined forest of stone from every tree of which drooped the blurred, heavy white fruit of martyrdom, baffled, her soul shriven with the agonizing frustration and gruesome defeat of her grisly triumph, cringed Mary of Alexandria.

And so night fell on the first day of the last great massacre of the early Christians.



## VII

**WHEN** Mary descended from her litter, late that night, slaves rushed from her mansion to greet her. Dully and without interest she learned that, despite the vigilance of the guards, Niobides had escaped through an egress leading from the pavilion in her gardens. Among the Christians the news spread that he had been delivered by an angel.

This rumor inspired the terrorized Christians. The next day the massacre began anew. Under Olympiodorus and his leaders, including many professors of philosophy of the city who had been infuriated beyond endurance by the climacteric indignity offered in the violation of the sacred chamber of Mithra, mobs continued their murderous skirmishes throughout the city, dragging the victims to the temple of Serapis, where, out of unabated, revengeful ferocity, they were ruthlessly tortured and butchered. The massacre lasted many days, but Mary, depressed and disheartened, stayed away. Under the direct command of Theophilus, the Christians organized in bodies and armed themselves for defence. Battles occurred in the streets. While few of the heathen were killed, countless Christians fell before their foes. The tide of the conflict turned, however, and the heathen rioters, confronted and attacked by the countless hosts of Theophilus, were at last compelled to barricade themselves in the Serapium, making excursions into the city only when opportunity offered. After repeated coercive demands from Theophilus, the Governor was constrained to withdraw the stationaries from the fray; in fact, alarmed and intimidated by the menacing threats of the Patriarch, he was compelled finally to direct the commander-in-chief of the legions to call forth the entire army stationed in Egypt to stop the slaughter. The fight was prolonged until both the pagans and Christians were exhausted, and, by a concerted action of the Governor, the commander-in-chief of the legions, and the Patriarch, a truce was declared, both sides laying down their arms until a verdict should be received from the Emperor. Meanwhile, throughout the

world, with tongues of fire, the news spread concerning the sufferings of the martyrs. From their blood bloomed blossoms of faith; the earth was beautified by the example of their bravery and patient endurance. The faithful who survived in Alexandria were not disheartened, for in heaven, they knew, their loved ones among the slain wore martyrs' crowns. Nor was the atrocity without its reward upon earth. From defeat, as ever for those who endure martyrdom and persecution, sprang victory.

In response to the solicitation of Theophilus, a rescript came from the Emperor Theodosius ordering—as punishment for the martyrdom—the overthrow of all idols in Alexandria and the razing to the ground of all heathen temples. He condemned the image of Serapis to destruction. In this work of demolition the Governor of Alexandria and the commander-in-chief of the armies of Egypt were ordered, by imperial edict, to assist Theophilus, under whose direction the execution of the work was placed. The temple of Serapis—one of the most magnificent and stupendous edifices in the whole world—was torn down and laid bare; the entire edifice, that marvel of the world and the pride of Alexandria, was reduced to a heap of wreckage. Of its fabulous treasures the temple was despoiled by the greedy and avaricious archbishop. Its adjacent buildings were pillaged, the famed library, embracing the most valued treasures of learning in the world, the masterpieces of ancient genius, including the poems of Sappho and the volumes of Pergamus, was ruthlessly wiped out by fire. With an axe a Christian soldier ascended a ladder and smote the jewelled cheeks of the idol. Even the superstitious Christians awaited the result of the desperate blow with fearful suspense. But no thunders reverberated from the skies; neither earth nor heaven was reduced to chaos. The sun shone, the elements were tranquil. The blows were repeated again and again, and with a resounding crash the image fell. Its broken limbs were dragged in triumph through the streets of the city, and its remains burnt, amid riotous acclamations, in the amphitheatre. With its collapse, paganism was conquered forever.

For a while the pagans, spiritless, cowed and bereft of

courage, hoped the desecrated god would avenge himself and signify his displeasure by withholding the annual inundation of the Nile. For an extraordinarily long while after the timely season the rise of the river was delayed. Their secret rejoicing was soon blasted, however, for the river rose with an unprecedented swell, irrigating the valley and insuring a season's fertile harvest to the earth. Profaned, outraged, overthrown, his image destroyed, the god of the pagans failed to exercise, in the hour of supreme extremity, the miraculous powers ascribed to him. And thus, among the credulous, disillusioned, weak, impressionable heathen, his superstition was broken.

In the ruins of the destroyed Serapium were found stones bearing an ancient hieroglyphic, with the figure of a Cross, which, being interpreted, read: "When the Life to Come (meaning the Cross) shall appear, the image of Serapis will be destroyed." Learning of this, countless pagans immediately espoused Christianity, confessed their sins, and were baptized. This profession on the part of many was not, however, without ulterior temporal and altogether unworthy motives.

By a subsequent edict issued by Theodosius all pagan sacrifices were absolutely and comprehensively prohibited under heavy penalties. According to the enactment, it was "the will and pleasure" of the Emperor to prohibit all subjects, "whether magistrates or private citizens, however exalted or however humble may be their rank or condition, to presume, in any city or in any place, to worship an inanimate idol." \* Sacrifices of any living thing, and the rites of divination by the entrails of the victim, were proscribed as an act of high treason against the state, punishable with death. Even the less bloody rites were abolished, and the performance of ceremonies with the use of garlands, incense, and libations of wine was forbidden, the penalty for such violation being the forfeiture of all estates owned by the offender, or, if the offence were committed on property owned by another, a fine of twenty-five pounds of gold, or more than one thousand pounds sterling. A fine was imposed upon all persons, graded according to their stations, who should conceal their knowledge,

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\* Code of Theodosius, lib. 16, tit. 10, leg. 12, 17, and 19.

or conspire to the performance of any practice of idolatry.

The temples of Alexandria were razed to the ground. The idols and vases of gold and silver were melted into vessels for use in the Christian churches. The rich treasures of the temples were sold for the relief of the Christian poor. The less valuable of the idols, of wood, stone and crude metals, were dismembered, smashed, and ignominiously cast into the streets. Of all the heathen images, but one—that the most monstrous—was left standing, being set up in the Forum by order of Theophilus, “lest,” said he, “at a future time the heathen should deny they had ever worshipped such gods.”

The Church of Alexandria enjoyed an influx of pagan proselytes. Terrified and overawed by the imperial mandates, apprehensive of the penalties of the new code, soft and yielding, they outwardly conformed to the Christian faith, attended services, imitated the postures and repeated the prayers of the Christians, made confession in the Penitential and partook of Communion. If in their hearts they resented this servile and reluctant submission to the reigning creed, and retained a love and veneration for the old gods, they kept it discreetly concealed. Those who still desired to offer sacrifices to the gods were compelled to do so surreptitiously, and on the occasion of solemn festivals they disguised the celebrations as convivial social gatherings. Even at these, for fear of severe punishment, they refrained from making burnt offerings of animals and even of salt-cakes and wine.

Aristobolus, the high priest, was shorn of his position and power. With his disgrace, as men often find, he was deserted by Mary, the woman he loved.

Christianity spread throughout Egypt. Favored by the Emperor, endowed with imperial authority, the Patriarch exercised increasing powers, participating in the politics of the city and influencing the policies of government. He continued his warfare, temporal and spiritual, against schismatics, Jews and pagans, and spread and strengthened the earthly jurisdiction of the Keys of Peter. The communities of monks multiplied along the Nile; towns grew up in a day about some hut, cave, or mound of rocks where some hermit, reputed to work miracles and cure the sick, abode. Theophilus, in memory

of the martyrs who had perished there, erected a Christian chapel in the midst of the ruined Serapium.

Hated and reviled by the Christians, denounced upon the streets as the scarlet woman prophesied by John in Patmos, Mary continued her career of glory and infamy, and, with ever-new lovers who came with gifts from all parts of the world—princes, merchants, masters of ships, allured by her fame over the seven seas, from beyond the mountains of Kaf—she lived amid palatial splendor in a house which, of its kind, was the most famed in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

## BOOK SECOND

### MARY, THE GREAT COURTESAN

**"AND THE WOMAN WAS ARRAYED IN PURPLE AND SCARLET COLOR, AND DECKED WITH GOLD AND PRECIOUS STONES AND PEARLS, HAVING A GOLDEN CUP IN HER HAND."—REVELATION XVII: 4.**

**"AND MARY, TO REVENGE HERSELF FOR HER FALL, WITH EVIL AND WICKED PURPOSE EMBARKED WITH THE PILGRIMS TO GO UNTO JERUSALEM." — FROM THE CHRONICLES OF ST. CERACIUS.**



## BOOK SECOND

### VIII

THE windows of Mary's house were of multi-colored glass, blown thin as films of foam, and palpitant with every hue of rainbow light and moonshine. Located on the height of a hill in the fashionable quarter of Brucheum, from the terraced roof one beheld a dazzling panorama reaching from the sea to Lake Mareotis, from the Necropolis on the one side to the red desert on the other. The palace was one of the most splendid in the city.

Strange stories were told of the house of Mary, and, as recounted by the wagging tongues of gossip, stranger still were the dreams of those who spent their nights therein. No Christians passed the dwelling save they made the sign of the Cross and, to show their horror of the scarlet woman who abode there, spat at Mary's door.

Each morning the door was covered with wreaths of fresh flowers—blood-red anemones, violets, eglantine, camomile blossoms, and narcissus—left there by admirers, with impassioned verses attached, the night before. Sometimes ascetics came from the desert and paused without, declaiming the curses of the prophet Ezekiel: "*Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side!*" Then Mary and her hand-maidens, her lovers and slaves would appear on the roof, shout playful taunts at the holy men, pelt them with fruit-rinds and flowers, and invite them mockingly to come within.

Inside a gate of bronze intricately filigreed by the tortured fingers of artificers, in the vestibule leading to the atrium, or outer court, by night and day two Nubian slaves, nude, their oiled skin gleaming like polished ebony, served as gatemen. They wore Egyptian headdress and held gleaming scimitars. They were gigantic of stature and possessed great strength. Their eyes were like white beads; their black faces had been hideously mutilated. Had they been able to speak, so 'twas said, they could have told the fate of many men who mysteriously disap-



peared from their homes and haunts in Alexandria. But, even had they wished, they could not. Their tongues long before had been cloven from their mouths. Consequently as servants they were to be adjudged discreet.

No two porters in Alexandria opened their doors to such a number and variety of guests. Among those before whom they obsequiously salaamed were numbered the wealthiest men of the city, including the most respectable, who came, heavily-cloaked, under the concealment of night; notorious spend-thrifts and gamblers; gallants, men of fashion, politicians, magistrates philosophers, poets, teachers of rhetoric, and, despised by the patricians but welcomed by Mary, money-lenders, money-changers, bankers—long-bearded, hook-nosed, sleek-fingered, suave, inordinately wealthy Jews. There came betimes notabilities from foreign lands—wealthy debauchees from Rome, fat gourmets puffed up with high living and sated with luxury and vice, seeking the novel thrills afforded in travel; princes from India, with skin like brown leather, their cloaks embroidered with gems the size of pigeons' eggs; Goth warriors from the North, hirsute and gnarled-limbed men, curiously wearing the silken tunics of Rome under bear-skin coats; provincial rulers from Cathay, little stooped men with furtive, cunning, narrow eyes, wearing coats of crimson and purple silk emblazoned with golden dragons, who brought diseases and embroideries from the scented East; potentates from Persia, who worshipped the sun, soft of voice, with velvet eyes, followed by retinues waving peacock plumes; blonde captains of great ships from the far seas of the North, sturdy and ruddy men with full-blooded lips and blue eyes, whose voices, deep and mellow, extolled in saga-songs heroes carried by warriors-maiden into a Valhalla of the strong, a god that prolonged his life by the killing of his ten sons, and who told marvellous tales of lands of ice, with mountains of perpetual snow; chieftains from the desert, men as restive and fine-tempered as their fiery steeds, swarthy-skinned, gleaming-eyed, wearing burnous and turban; black rulers from the darkling heart of Africa, with small bullet-shaped heads, with bloated lips, and teeth like ivory, in their ears and noses grotesque rings set with jewels of enormous size, and in their

headdress the flaming plumage of tropic birds. About the necks of some were necklaces of the teeth of human beings. They were amiable creatures, as naïve as children, who grinned incessantly, and brought with them a wealth of uncut emeralds and masses of crude gold. Delicate, effete, worldly-wise, there came youths from Greece possessing the epicene beauty given to Apollo by Praxiteles, familiar with philosophy, supercilious concerning the love of women, and in curious contrast to the coarser men who sought coarser pleasures—the magnates in wool, corn merchants, jewellers, gold- and silver-smiths, traders of the sea, of every land and nationality, who came, all, however, bearing their tribute—rich cloths, silks from the fairs of Nisibis, wares from the markets of Samarcand and Bokhara, rare spices, perfumes, caskets of jewels, the feathers of birds and cedar chests of gold. In all the city no hostess received so openly, so lavishly; yet none was so arbitrary in determining the admission or exclusion of her guests.

Notwithstanding the untold wealth she received from those who visited her, Mary dissipated it in extravagant luxury. She never knew freedom from debt. She contributed to the prosperity of the jewellers and merchants of Alexandria. The slaves of her household robbed her; everywhere she was overcharged and cheated. Despite her scepticism, she was femininely superstitious and was preyed upon by astrologers, fortune-tellers, and sorcerers. Ever fearful of the curses of the poor, to an army of outcasts, of ruined, devitiated women, and the worthless husks of the human scum throughout the city, Mary flung an unaccounted largess. Upon the bread and victuals left over from her banquet tables a thousand beggars lived to sing her praise.

The inner court, or peristyle, of the mansion was spacious and admirably built, and beautified with carvings and paintings by the most celebrated decorators of the city. Galleries ran about the upper stories and led to the wings of the building. Opening upon the court were balconies fronted with ornate balustrades and spanned by groined arcades supported by fluted pilasters. From the colonnade on the ground floor

doors of carved teakwood and cedar, set with ivory and mother-of-pearl, opened to the rooms of the mansion ; on all sides were alcoves and recesses, fitted with cushioned couches, and discreetly overhung with antique Babylonian tapestries. Slender columns of lapis lazuli, with gilded capitals, surrounded a sunken pool, or piscina, in the centre of which a fountain ejaculated a perpetual spray, and in which eels, tadpoles, gold and silver fish darted amid diaphanous mosses. About the pool were orange trees, mimosas, dwarf acacias, palmettos, and oleanders effulgent with purple bloom. Out of large terra-cotta urns filled with ferns and mosses writhed weird flowers from the heart of Africa—monstrous orchids, some of which, with swollen bodies, yellow-and-black mottled, with tremulous black antennæ, looked like poisonous tarantulas waiting to entwine unwary prey ; others resembled unnatural beetles with beady eyes ; another variety, with glistening green, globular pouches, red-speckled, with darting crimson stamens, crept out of the ferny undergrowth like deadly cobras with puffed throats. Peering forth, with a seeming expression of mocking malevolence, was a singular species whose large, softly-curving petals of a sickly pinkish hue represented the imperfect features of a human face ; it bore the crimson-blotched semblance of a human mouth and two phosphorescently purple irises that mimicked human eyes. Here and there out of the shrubbery dead-white, corpse-like hands reached, flower-fingers that quivered sentiently whenever a living thing approached. They were strange flowers brought by African chiefs, and they pleased the perverse fancy of Mary.

Amid the shrubbery, between the columns and about the basin, gleamed the white limbs of exquisite statues. Leda swooningly reposed in the embrace of her swan. The boy Apollo coyly and half-reluctantly reached for the proffered flute of a suggestively leering Pan. Venus, driving her doves, rose luminous from the rippling waters, and bending over the pool, his marble eyes framing an imperishable dream, Narcissus gazed, unwearily enamoured, upon his face.

A network of golden wire spanned the unroofed opening above the pool and imprisoned within the court hundreds of tropic birds—parrakeets, vivid little green things that flut-

tered about like falling leaves, or, perching in the branches of the oleander and orange trees, with silly noises and pecking of beaks, made love in a most droll and comical way; sunbirds which sang lustily by day, and nightingales whose bosoms seemed to burst with silver swells of song when the moon rose and flooded the courtyard by night.

The walls were covered with paintings, erotic in character, representing the *liaisons* of the gods and all the vices of the age. In the balconies and colonnades were suspended countless Byzantine lamps, of massy bronze, flickering at night like jewelled eyes. Sumptuous rugs, soft as thick moss, were thrown over the mosaic floor. Surrounding the pool, and under canopies of rose-colored satin silk, were low couches covered with embroidered cushions, and tables with legs grotesquely carved into the likeness of mythological animals and birds. Incense burners of green bronze, supported by nude figures, fumed incessantly.

One morning Mary reclined on a couch gazing abstractedly at the fish darting among the mosses in the depth of the pool. She was alone.

The merriment had continued late the night before; there had been a dispute among a half-dozen philosophers; Almachus had recited a new poem in Mary's honor; several fortunes had been lost in gambling; Cyprian, the son of Philamon the corn merchant, being drunk, had attempted to drown himself in the piscina and had been conveyed to his home in a litter, unconscious and sodden.

Among the guests had been two Norse mariners who had come from a voyage in the seas far north. They told wildly-engrossing tales to Mary. They had sailed, so they declared, into an unimaginable ocean, where there were ghostly galleys with silver sails, and where the shadows of the gods moved along the skies. It was cold there—they had landed on the shores of a continent where no grass grew and no flowers bloomed. The white expanses were stained with streaks of crimson, the bloodshed of centuries; they hazarded there had been battles among the giants. It was a region of perpetual day, where the sun, never setting, lay low over the horizon,

circling the sky, and gave no heat. It must have been, they said, the fabled land of the Hyperboreans, where silver birds nest among the invisible trees of the sky. For while they were there the feathers of these birds had fallen; they were soft, glistened like silver, yet of such magical quality they vanished beneath one's touch. To these accounts Mary listened with far-off, wondering gaze, and whenever they paused in their narrative, with bated eagerness, scarce above a whisper, she would urge them to tell her more. But they had not experienced the most marvellous things. Their master, the owner of the galleys they sailed, had had adventures comparable to no man's; he could tell her of marvels stranger than those of the tales of the Arabians. He had voyaged even farther than they. He had gone into a realm of the world where there was no day, only prolonged night; where the stars were of the size of the tropic moon, of the colors of jewels, and where the lightnings of the gods, multi-colored, were flung across the sky. He was a mighty prince of the seas, favored of Odin; he owned fleets of ships, commerced with far lands; he had discovered unknown islands, had invaded caves inhabited by winged serpents; his wealth was beyond calculation; he had palaces along the Ganges and on islands the shores of which were lined with ambergris, cast up by the sea. He was a great warrior, ruled over conquered kingdoms, carried on tribal wars along the coasts of Africa among the blacks; he enjoyed the favor of both the Emperors of the East and the West, and, beyond all men of the seas, was brave. Yea, he could tell Mary more wondrous tales. They would tell him of her. When he visited Alexandria they would send him to her.

When she retired, dawn had already kissed the sky. The breeze entering her casement was feverish. Haunted by the strange tales she had heard, Mary was unable to sleep. Rising, she summoned slaves and bathed. In the courtyard, alone, she lay on the couch, her hands idly dipping into the water of the piscina. Now and then she held her arm forth and let the fountain spray play upon her wrist.

Mary wore a diaphanous tunic which revealed the incomparable curves of her limbs and, through the translucent tex-

ture, the delicate tendrils of branching veins, blue through the lucid whiteness of her skin. Her face, usually impervious to fatigue, was inordinately pale. After bathing, weary and restless, she had impatiently refused to endure the enhancing arts of the toilet. Her hair, redly golden, was wound in a pyramid upon her head. She wore no jewels.

At the foot of the couch, loudly purring, lay a black panther, Mary's favorite pet, which some years before had been given to her as a kitten by an African chieftain. Mary and her favorite were inseparable. Sometimes, its jaws covered with a golden muzzle, Mary took the animal with her as she promenaded the esplanades, in the shade of the plane trees. There was a curiously contrasting similarity between this woman—savagely, whitely beautiful—and the monstrous cat with its skin of sable velvet, voluptuous and vicious-tempered, and coal-glowing green eyes not unlike the eyes of Mary. The animal fawned upon its mistress. As it lay purring in its sleep it occasionally extended its red tongue, without opening its eyes, and licked Mary's sandalled feet. Presently Mary looked up, the long fringed lids drooping wearily over her eyes.

"Strange gifts those seamen brought!" she mused. "Ne'er saw I the like before! Ivories from elephants that live in frigid seas! Spiral tusks like the horn of the unicorn! Furs softer than silk, blacker than night! A strange land—that land of sunlight and eternal coldness, where there are no trees, no flowers. Oh gods of Egypt, would at this hour I were there! That in the waters of those chill seas I might bathe my head! That on a couch of ice, beneath congealing winds, I might grow cold, cold, and suffer the fever of dreams no more! Land where the Hyperboreans dwell, where there are no nights—would I were there—there, where beasts of men do not lie in their vomit under the tables! Would that I might be buried under those magical soft feathers that fall from the birds which nest in the silver trees of those northern skies!"

Her delicate nostrils quivered and an expression of nausea passed over her face. She clapped her hands.

Immediately two slaves appeared.

"Extinguish the braziers," she commanded. "The stench fills me with sickness! My brain is befogged with incense!"

The slaves removed the burning gums. Mary stayed them.

"Draw back the awnings," she called, impatiently. "I want air—air! The place stifles me with its vapors! My lungs are filled with smoke! I want air and light! By the gods, it seemeth moons since I have gazed upon the sun!"

As the rose-colored shades were rolled from overhead the glare of late morning flamed into the court. A joyous chatter went up from the macaws and sunbirds. A toucan uttered a hideous scream. Even the sleeping ibis, preening its pink wings delightedly in the pool, awoke from its dreams.

"Begone, pups of Cerberus! Let me alone!"

The slaves scurried.

Mary rose. The panther stirred itself with a growl.

Mary paced the courtyard, beating her hands with increasing disquietude. Her restiveness excited the panther. It moved softly behind her, its body undulating, its tail swishing the floor. The creature shared in Mary's moods—when she was momentarily content, it would purr delightedly; when she was vexed, it was known to attack those who approached it. Once it had killed a slave who had offended Mary. Occasionally it looked interrogatively at Mary, the pupils of its eyes distending and burning like emeralds; then, almost inaudibly growling, it lashed the floor more furiously with its tail. The velvet skin over its spine irritatedly quivered.

"Men bring me wealth, yet I am always in debt! The accursed Jews give me no peace! Men sell their slaves, their villas, their vineyards that for an hour they may be here. Having known my lips, they boast no less vaingloriously than a conqueror boasts of victory in war! Yet what does life give unto me? Their gifts run through my fingers as water! When that voracious vulture, Solomon Ben-Ezra, gives me loans, he suffers as the behemoth sweating blood. Hell-dog of the underworld, that I might throttle him! 'Thou shouldst live more economically,' he complains. Economically! Almighty gods, I am no Jew! Sometimes I bethink me the security of marriage, even if one groweth fat, is desirable.

Yet what man could I endure for a week! Stupid and swinish—all! With a husband to tyrannize over me I should go mad—mad! Verily, most women are cattle, even as the Platonists deem them—creatures without intellect and philosophy, vessels for the bearing of children, unworthy of confidence, incapable of inspiring love, fit only as domestic drudges to look after men's households, wash their muslin and tunics! Holy gods! To be a breeding chattel! Methinks there should be a place in the world for women higher than this! Perchance there is a future more vast and beautiful than any we know! For some such thing I long—the power of Aspasia in affairs of state, the joy Sappho had in song! Helas! To-day what fame is there for woman save she becometh an instrument of men's pleasure? Implacable Aphrodite, my soul is sickened by the ignominy of thy service! Am I more free than any servile wife, suffering the tyranny of one man! Hour after hour, day after day, I but change my masters. And for what? Debts, worry, restlessness of mind! Women envy me, yea—but, though my position is different, am I far removed from those mean and degraded women of Rome who, in punishment for crime, were imprisoned in narrow brothels and compelled to submit to common men, outside of whose haunts, in vulgar mockery, while they trafficked, bells were rung! Gods, I loathe the insinuating insult of leering men! Their praises rile and affront me! Verily, they were wise, those strange women who refused themselves to men and waited for the gods to come! Did they, as I, find men as clods?—Io, daughter of Imachus, who gave herself to Zeus; Pasiphæ, who thrilled to the germinal breath of all nature in the embrace of her white bellowing lover; Leda, who knew the rapture, in the plumed embrace of her swan, of the fleet-soaring winged things of the air! Yea, and those whom Phœbus Apollo, the golden, loved! Daphne, who became green with the fecundating outburst of springtime in the embrace of her lover, the pursuing sun! Alas! In our time the gods do not come unto us! Oh, inexorable Aphrodite, would I were away from Alexandria, away from the world of men! Would that I might wander over the white, wan wastes of that land where the blood of slain giants reddens the silver earth, where the sun never sets, and where it is forever cold!”



Leaning over the basin, she bathed her forehead in the cooling waters. Her eyelids drooped heavily. "Sometimes I wonder if in the bosom of the Divine Absolute itself is found Plato's dream of perfect immaterial beauty; yea, if the soul when absorbed into the Eternal shall know divine oblivion . . . or if . . . pitiless gods—the thought sets my spirit cold!" She clasped her hands on her bosom, and her voice fell. For a long while she was silent. "As a child I knew but one moment's illusion, one moment's peace—and that was because I was ignorant. Yea, I had no desire beyond Maximilian's lips, no premonition of unrest when the hour should be o'er. Thus it is with life—one thrills only in the novelty of experience, and that is ended too speedily. Methinks all lovers should die in their first embrace; there would be no disillusion, no waning of affection, no reaction of satiety and aversion! Ah, the only thing worth while in life is the memory of a great sorrow. Life destroys all romance; death, perchance, may immortalize it."

She crushed in her hand a hibiscus flower and flung it, bleeding, into the pool.

At that moment the door of one of the chambers opened and Doria, the Christian maiden whom Mary had saved from the massacre, appeared. She was a timid, shrinking creature, and Mary's favorite among the slaves.

"Mistress, Regin the Long-Beard, he who told thee the terrible tale of the wolf Fenris, whose nose and jaw span earth and sky, hath wakened. He is still in his cups and asks for thee!"

Far away in an inner chamber Mary heard a boisterous voice singing a fragment of one of the northern sagas.

Mary turned upon the girl impatiently.

"Leave me! Leave me! How darest thou disturb me! Regin asketh for me, forsooth! Did he not leave his gifts last night! Did he not witness the dances! Did I not listen to his tales? Can he not go forth to boast in the land of his thunder gods that he hath been entertained by me! Thou sayest he is drunken! Well, by the gods, 'tis time he should be sobered! Throw him into the street! His vainglorious songs annoy me! And hearken unto me! Ne'er did I close

mine eyes last night. I am ill. I want to be alone. Let no one disturb me. Get hence! If any of thy shallow-brained companions shows her face, by the gods, she shall be flogged! Go!"

Paling, Doria fled. Accustomed to Mary's moods and having more than once suffered from the exasperation of their mistress's nerves, the slaves remained discreetly secluded in the inner chambers. The seafaring guest, who had merrily wakened with a desire to see Mary ere his departure to the North, was brusquely aroused from his couch by four gigantic negroes and, before he realized what was happening, was unceremoniously ousted into the street.

"Bah! The fools! They say I am mistress of the hearts of a thousand men! Oh!"—she beat her hands fiercely—"would I had the courage to go away from here, away from Alexandria! I am weary. Of this life I am sick. By the gods, those dogs of Christians are right—there is no joy in pleasure! Yet what is it I desire? A worm crawls in my heart. The astrologers tell me naught. The soothsayers dupe and deceive me. They offer me philters, aphrodisiacs, and balsams. Their philters are inefficacious and inert. They read globes, and tell me nonsense as they watch gold-fish in water. Necromancers call upon the dead—and the dead lie! Magicians invoke exorcisms throughout my house! Yet I find no rest! I give gold to haruspices who read the future by the entrails of animals, yet their puerile predictions of wealth and travel and princely lovers, white-haired and black, satisfy me not! What care I for wealth or lovers, be they slaves or princes—gods, gods, that is not what I desire! Isis, Serapis, what is this curse that besets me? This very house betimes inspires me with revulsion and horror. There is not a nook in which I have not heard words of love. Liars! Men never love! Grisly spectres crawl about me now in the sunlight. I can feel them. I can feel them all about. The flowers breathe poison. I hate those nasty little birds—hate them, hate them! They look at me, and I know among themselves they are mocking me." She glowered at the droll parakeets chattering in the branches of the shrubbery. Angrily clapping her hands, she routed them. They flew wildly against

the wire net overhead and perched there, affrighted. "I am sick—sick, and yet of my illness all the devotees of Æsculapius in Alexandria can not cure me."

Ceasing suddenly to growl, the panther rolled luxuriously on the floor, its great paws playing with Mary's dress as if to attract her attention. Rubbing its velvet head upon her feet, it intermittently purred and growled.

Mary looked downward and a gleam of affection lighted her eyes.

"Adorable beast!" she breathed softly, sinking to her knees. "Thou lovest more adequately than all men—in sooth because thou lovest without desire!" The panther, delighted, kittenishly pawed at her in the air. With both hands she seized the paws and dug her finger-nails into the soft, warm interstices between the velvet-sheathed claws. She felt the animal shiver voluptuously. "Glorious cat!" she breathed, "because thou art disdainful and vicious I love thee!" The animal drooled saliva, its phosphorescent eyes rolled abandonedly. Infected by its savagery, Mary clenched the animal's neck between her two fists. As her fingers sank ruthlessly into the yielding silken throat she shook the jungle creature to and fro with passionate ferocity. Instead of resenting this ungentle treatment, the panther quivered with sensuous pleasure, and whenever the woman's throttling hold relaxed it purred delightedly. In the sombre sea-green depths of Mary's eyes the yellow flecks distended.

"Thus, my Horus, would I embrace all men! Thus would I close my fingers on their throats and throttle the vile breath from their bodies! Horus! Horus! We both have the same hunger, thou and I! We love all men so! To see them writhe and suffer! To stifle the life from their bodies, the passion from their hearts! And to leave them cold—cold! Never to see them stir away from us, indifferent, content. Yea, perchance dead they might appease us!" Her body swayed to and fro as she shook the animal. Then, breathless, she suddenly thrust the beast from her and sprang to her feet, her nostrils quivering, red spots on her pale cheeks.

Frightened by the hypnotic sound of the animal's purring, the macaws and sunbirds became silent, and the ibis, disturbed, hid itself in the shelter of some lotus lilies.

"And what if I should leave this place and sail from Alexandria into far regions of the world? What if I should wander into those silver wastes of eternal day, where it is cold, and birds nest in the trees of the stars? Would those chill winds cool my brow, bring surcease to the itching curiosities of my brain, extinguish the fever of my senses? Nay, I fear I should be driven farther, farther on—for the goal of peace would ever be beyond me. Holy gods, if in life there is no rest, I wonder if there is peace in death." She flung herself upon a couch. "I am tired, tired. It seemeth my feet ache with the traversing of centuries. Ah, to sink into the eternal dark, the cold, the silence, and to rest without consciousness—deliciously!"

Drawing from her girdle a tiny gold phial, she held it before her. "A magician gave it to me for a fabulous price." She unscrewed it and smelled the contents. "As fragrant as the mandragora. . . . 'Let thy tongue taste of it,' said he, 'Thou shalt find it sweet. Thou shalt pass into a realm of multi-colored visions. Sea sirens shall sing at thy feet. Thy pulses shall thrill to the music of bulbuls. Lovers more radiant than Apollo, blacker than night, and fierce as giant black-amoores; delicate as girls and fair as the son of Hermes and Venus, acquainted with subtleties of kisses; some whose breath is as fire, and others with hands cold as the snows of the mountains—these shall come unto thee and possess thee! Thou shalt know the movement of the stars, the rapture of the seasons, the acme of all delight. Thou shalt pass into delicious exhaustion and thus into the great darkness.' 'And after that?' I asked. 'After that,' the wise man replied, 'there is nothing.'"

She paused, a far-away look in her eyes. Slowly, mechanically, she lifted the phial until it was nigh to her lips. "Nothing? . . . " Her hand fell to her lap, and in a chill voice she whispered, "Nothing—if there were nothing I should not fear. But what if, in the darkness, wilder anxieties should beset me, if phantoms of older dreams, of lives lived before, should pursue me; what if, instead of the calm and peace of dreamless sleep, I should burn with more goading unrests!"

She looked at the phial and shivered. The fountain gurgled volubly. A toucan opened its rainbow-colored beak and screamed. Frightened, Mary flung the phial into the pool.

"Yea," she murmured in a low, awed tone, "'tis not nothing . . . after death . . . but what? The dead come to us in dreams—they do not die. . . . In that land of gloom whence Anubis leads our souls . . . is there aught of pausing by the wayside? Is there a time of rest and a sleeping between the waking to other lives? . . . Ah, in that land where there is no light of sun, and no flowers bloom, Isis, queen of the manes, tell me, is there resting . . . if only for a little . . . little while?"

The birds were silent. The great cat lay on the floor, its eyes closed. One by one gold-fish and eels rose to the surface of the pool, turning their tiny white bellies upward, killed by the disseminating poison in the water. Mary looked upon them dully, marking them as they appeared. A while ago they had darted through the mosses instinct with life—now something had gone out of them. What had departed? Whither had the tiny life-spark gone? Into nothingness? Mary shook her head, vaguely worried; a baffled half-fear, half-hope—in that sudden confronting with the dual problem of the world—in her eyes. . . . What was there in that realm where the life-breath melted? For the seeking heart was there solace?—was there aught of perfect and abiding love?

Mary's reverie was suddenly interrupted by a savage growl.

"Down, Horus! Down!" Crouching to the floor, its long body sinuously writhing, its eyes glowering, the panther faced the doorway leading from the outer court, ready to spring.

A slave entered, bowing low.

"His excellency, Caius Marcellus, prefect of the corn fleet!"

Mary abandoned herself to a fit of passion.

"By the anger of Seb, I tell thee—no! I will not see him! By the howling watch-dog of hell, why am I afflicted thus? Am I his slave to receive him at his bidding? I want to be alone—I want to breathe—I want to think! Judges of the dead, give me the punishment of mankind's forty-two sins, but save me from yon hippopotamus! The prefect of the corn fleet, forsooth! Say unto him I am sick—ill with fever! He is a pig! How dareth he demand to see me! He hath the beauty of a swollen-up wine-skin! He hath the grace of an elephant! Go—go! Tell him——"

The Nubian salaamed. Rising, Mary suddenly withheld him by a gesture.

"No, no! No, no!" She shook her head.

The slave awaited her orders.

Mary remembered—opportunistically and woman-like—that she had urgent and egregious bills to pay. Jew money-lenders were clamoring for their usurious interest. One especially, Joseph Ben-Levi, had made abominable threats. Mary swore that at all costs she would rid herself of him. The coffers in Mary's chamber, filled with gifts of recent visitors, were inadequate to meet the immediate demands of dressmakers, jewellers, perfumers, dealers in wines and foodstuffs. Not a fortnight since, Mary had been robbed by a Bithynian sailor of a small fortune which Domintius Severnus, a young profligate, had given her, and to secure which he had sold a vineyard in Sicily. In common with those women to whom money comes easily, Mary entirely lacked an appreciation of its value and improvidently squandered it in extravagance. Nevertheless, with an intellectual quality not ordinarily given her sex, she possessed a certain shrewdness; and, although temperamentally given to moods, hysterical rages, and enthusiasms, she was ever calmly appreciative of her needs and opportunities, her life and its necessities.

During the brief interval she stood undecided, her finger upon her lips, many considerations passed through her mind. More than the need for money, she considered her position, its vicissitudes and precariousness, and she realized—while she detained the slave—how eminently desirable was the protection of a man of such wealth and influence as Caius Marcellus, prefect of the corn fleet.

Since the imperial edict ordering the destruction of the pagan temples and forbidding, under heavy penalties, all sacrifices to the pagan gods, the Alexandrian Patriarch had not confined his efforts to the destruction of temples and the building of churches, the harassment of Jews, and the propaganda of the faith, but had instituted a campaign against the vices of the city, and had announced his intention of exterminating prostitutes and courtesans. His formal requests to the prefect were obeyed as if they were imperial decrees. With the powers

of the government extended in favor of the Church, all desirous of enjoying influence and of securing preferment in the city found it expedient to cater to the long-bearded, tyrannical archbishop, who wielded a power surpassing that of any potentate of the age, in a bare room, scarcely clean, situated in an obscure street near the pillaged Serapium.

Theophilus now enjoyed the ear and confidence of Theodosius, and in Alexandria, the most important metropolis of the world, and the scene of the final conflict between the old gods and the Cross, Christianity had emerged from its defeat, from the blood of its martyrs, victorious, impregnable.

Eminent for her beauty and the splendor of her life, as the chief inciter of the great massacre, the Christians were implacable in their hatred of Mary. The majority believed her to be a sorceress, who lured the men of the city into her thrall by traffic with the powers of darkness. Bands of monks, coming from the desert into Alexandria, declaimed against her as the woman in scarlet who rode upon the dragon of hell. They demanded the burning of the habitation in which she dwelt. With the influence of the Christians directed against her, Mary realized the need of whatever political support she might control. Of old some of the most powerful prefects and magistrates had come openly to her house; now, fearful of antagonizing the Patriarch, they no longer came, or, if so, only secretly and by night. Ignoring the Christians, sufficiently wealthy to be indifferent to politics, Caius Marcellus, insanely infatuated, openly paid court to Mary.

"Stay!" Mary commanded the slave. Composing her features, she said:

"Convey my humble regards to His Excellency! Escort him thither! Bear unto him word that I go to deck myself fittingly to receive so honorable, so desirable a guest! Light the braziers! Let fragrant gums perfume the air! Fling down the awnings! The sun is hot! Let not so refined a guest suffer the languors of the day! Summon the singers! Command the Libyan dancers! Let our noble lord be served plenteously with chilled wine!"

Tossing her head, she extended her arm in peremptory command. The slave vanished.

Mary smiled, half-pitifully, half-amusedly.

"Aye, bid him await me here. Come, Horus!"

Less adept at concealing its emotions than she, the panther slunk after her, growling sullenly. Mistress and pet vanished through a doorway.

Slaves lowered the rose-colored awnings. They filled the braziers with lighted charcoal and Arabian gums. The curtains presently parted and a portly man entered. His countenance was apoplectic from too much drinking, the nose purpled, with thick rolls of flesh under his chin; his eyes were small, brilliant, rat-like; his head bald and shiny. By reason of the ponderous size of his abdomen, he moved with a cumbersome swinging gait. Caius Marcellus, as prefect of the corn fleet, possessing opportunities for the receipt of unbounded gratuities, had amassed great wealth. As that of all fat men, his outlook upon life was as cheerful as it was dull and obese; he was neither troubled by too great ambition nor too inquiring an intellect. He surveyed the courtyard with smug approval, pursed his thick lips, rubbed his fat hands unctuously. There was no doubt that Caius Marcellus viewed himself with prodigious approval, and was in perfect *rapproch* with the world. Puffing heavily, he sank upon a cushioned couch. A young Hebe appeared with an amphora of wine.

Approaching nearer and nearer, and increasing in feverish excitement, came the sound of castanets. Suddenly, with a cyclonic dash, twenty Libyan dancing girls stormed through the court—dark, vixen-eyed creatures, nimble of limb, moving with a quickness that surpassed the comprehension of the eye. They wore but the faintest excuse of veiling; there were silver bells on their ankles and wrists. They beat tambourines. They chased one another frantically; leaped through the air, invited and refused the prefect to their arms. Caius Marcellus quaffed his wine, observing them indifferently.

Caius became impatient. He made a weary gesture of dismissal and the dancers vanished. An hour had slipped away. Presently two slaves, girl-mannered boys wearing their long, blonde hair in golden nets, emerged from a doorway and, bowing, drew aside the curtains. Mary, nonchalantly waving



a fan of osprey plumes, languid, weary, her eyes drooping with feigned indifference, appeared.

Caius Marcellus, panting with excitement, was on his feet.

"More youthful and adorable than ever! They lie who say Venus hath vanished from the earth! Divine goddess! Truly as the days pass, robbing the other ladies of Alexandria of their freshness and charm, thy beauty waxeth more radiant. Immortal one! Where are thy roses? Where are thy myrtles? Where are thy doves? I congratulate thee! Thy toilet was never, by the Graces, more exquisite!"

"Greetings, Caius!"

Mary acknowledged her admirer's effusive compliments with an enchanting smile.

She was honored by so noble a visitor, one whom the gods had so blessed with the combined graces of Midas and Apollo. Caius Marcellus, sinking upon the divan, beamed.

Through the courtyard the sunlight, melting through the roseate awnings, diffused a subdued glow. In the foliage of a flaming oleander a bird was exquisitely singing.

In the interval of her absence Mary had completely changed her appearance. Her cheeks, no longer pale, had assumed a golden hue; upon her temples, like roses, bloomed two crimson spots. Her eyebrows had been blackened, and the long, beaded lashes heavily fringed her eyes. Her lips, voluptuously curved, were ripe and moist with a pomegranate-pith redness; the interior of the lobes of her nose were tinted with carmine; her hair, wound upon her head pyramid-fashion, and stiffened with pomatum, glinted with a phosphorescent powder and dust of gold. The sunlight crept livingly into its reddish meshes and seemed to stir the serpentine heads of live things. Mary was swathed in a diagonally folded tunic of silken tissue as softly lush as the web of spiders, shimmeringly changing in hue from pale yellow-green to bluish-purple, and hemmed with vivid iridescent spangles, resembling the sheeny scales of a fish. It clung to her limbs like soft sea-moss, and revealed eerily, rather than concealed, her form. Her softly-moulded arms were bare and milkily white in contrast to the assumed duski-ness of her face; her hands were scented, the nails of her fingers tinted with henna. Her great, full breasts, bared by the low

tunic, were supported by a *fascia*, or corset, of wool wound about, and thus accentuating, the slim lines of the waist. In her ears Mary wore heavy barbaric rings, chased of gold and set with pear-shaped emeralds of great size. About her neck were strings of emeralds glinting like tiger-eyes. On her arms were emerald hoops, and on her fingers emerald rings—all rare, choicely-picked gems, the whilom prized possessions of queens, stones purer than sea-water, liquid, alive as fire.

Mary moved across the court, slow, languorous, at once cold, and cool, and gorgeous. From her body, from the folds of her garments, exhaled insidious soft-creeping perfumes, as palpable as caressive hands, titillating to the senses, aphrodisiacal in effect—strange, magic scents known to the women of the ancients, by the subtle chemistry of which they wove their Circe-spells upon men, subtly inebriating their brains and unbalancing the restraints of passion.

Caius Marcellus felt his senses swimming. As he gazed upon Mary, transported, something seemed to stir within his overfed and pampered body. A gleam of genuine enthusiasm fired his bead-like, dull, blasé eyes.

“By the daughter of Uranus, thou art wonderful! Thou art fairer than Phryne on the sands of Eleusis, when, before twenty thousand, she bathed in the sea! Alas, that Apelles doth not live, that thou mightst pose for a more perfect Aphrodite-Anadyomene!” Rubbing his hands he enthused upon her—and listening, half-wearily, Mary smiled.

“Come, radiant son of Jupiter, child of Leto, desired of the Graces! The repast waits. The wine grows cool. The fingers of the cythera girls are impatient that they may make music for thee. The Athenian singers wait to sing thy favorite songs.”

“Daughter of the sea-foam,” he replied, “without, gifts await thy pleasure. I secured last night from a former Roman general an extraordinary bargain. The rascally devotee of Bacchus was high in his cups and, as he hath gone into the corn business and seeketh certain privileges, I secured the prize at an amazing figure! Aye, ’tis not less than a casket of rubies secured in a Parthian campaign from an Indian rajah! By the gods, they exceed in size those wonderful gems thou wear-

est so becomingly! They are, I swear, as gorgeous as the pearls the Cytherean wore when she was born of the sea. Thou wilt wear them well!"

Mary smiled with simulated disinterest, and her voice trailed nonchalantly:

"I desire no jewel save thy affection. Thou knowest, Caius, all I ask is thy influence, should it ever be necessary, with the divinest and most ineffable ass of all the Cæsars. Tell me. What news from Milan? Doth he still tarry there, doing penance for his foul deed at Thessalonica? Gods, 'tis an abject spectacle—the son of Valentinian's greatest general kneeling publicly in Ambrose's church, stripped of all insignia of royalty, wringing his hands, rocking his body to and fro, weeping and crying aloud in ostentatious lamentation for the pardon of his sins!"

The public penance of the Emperor, lasting through a period of many months, had aroused, throughout the empire, the pious approval of all Christians and the scornful contempt of the pagans. About a year before, the favorite charioteer of the circus in Thessalonica had been imprisoned by Botheric, the general of the garrison, because of his attentions to one of the general's beautiful slaves. On the day of the public games the populace demanded the release of their favorite,\* but the indignant Botheric refused. Thereupon Botheric and a number of his officers were murdered and the charioteer released. Enraged at the killing of his general, Theodosius hastily despatched a troop of barbarians to the city to revenge the death of Botheric. The punishment of the city was concerted in all secrecy. The inhabitants were invited, in the name of their sovereign, to attend the games of the circus, and came in great numbers. A signal was given—the populace believed for the opening of the races. Instead, soldiers appeared on all sides, armed with daggers. They fell upon the undefended people, ruthlessly and without discrimination killing citizens and strangers, men, women, and children. The massacre lasted three hours, and from seven to fifteen thousand were slain. When Ambrose heard of this frightful atrocity, filled

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\* "They considered the skill of a charioteer as an object of more importance than his virtue."—GIBBON.

with pain and horror, he fearlessly declared to the Emperor that he had been directed, in a vision, not to consecrate the Eucharist in his presence, and pronounced upon him the ban of excommunication. Moreover, Ambrose sternly refused his Majesty admittance to the church of Milan until, piteously imploring leniency, the bishop inflicted a public penance whereby, at all services in the midst of the church, for a period of over eight months, Theodosius prostrated himself on his knees before the altar, weeping, groaning, and crying aloud for forgiveness.

"'Tis said the imperial craven cringes with mawkish terror of the Christian Tartarus," said Mary. "By the gods, what an ignoble Hades!"

"Ah, the news hath just come," said Caius, "that Theodosius hath been forgiven! He rejoices in being restored to the Church. Methinks the daring insolence of Ambrose in commanding him who wields the sceptre of the world to a humiliating and grotesque abasement was animated not so much by a desire to give reproof for an abominable crime as to assert his authority over, and humble, the ruler of the world himself. Truly his penance was a preposterous spectacle!"

"Never was the imperial majesty of the throne so abased. But tell me——"

"Ah, I would bring thy jewels," Caius beamed. "Never have I seen such gems. When I opened yon casket methought the blaze would blind mine eyes! By the box of Pandora, they are like the jewels of the fabled islands! Permit me to bring them unto thee! I myself desire the pleasure of bedecking thee!"

Caius clapped his hands. A slave appeared. He ordered the jewel casket brought. Mary went on:

"And what about the Patriarch—what news concerning that keg of camels' dung?"

"Ah, a quick-witted knave! By the gods, I admire his acumen. Methinks we live in a world governed by Christian bishops! Theophilus's messengers go back and forth constantly between Alexandria and the imperial court. 'Tis marvellous how he hath gained the ear of the great Theodosius! By the larvæ that inflict mankind with diseases, he hath the

governor bending to his will—yea, the representative of the Cæsars hath no say of his own!”

Mary paced the floor.

“Holy gods, Alexandria is bowed in the dust of her ignominy!”

“The Christians are loud in their boastings—never have they been so insolent. Church after church rises, and there—to mock us for their triumph—they constantly travesty the sacrament of Mithra, actually breaking bread, partaking of it, and declaring ’tis the body of their Christ!” \*

“Insufferable insult!” hissed Mary. “But then, Caius, I have lost faith in the gods!”

“Thou believest not in the gods—well, such is becoming the fashion of the day! Venus alone is immortal!”

“Yea,” said Mary, “once I believed in the gods, and powers of light and of darkness, and in Serapis, judge of the dead. But for him now have I neither confidence nor respect. Even a divinity should preserve his dignity.”

Caius smiled.

“Such things trouble me not—but it must be confessed the growth of Christianity is an extraordinary thing. Within the space of a few years we have seen a despised and persecuted sect attain almost absolute power in the Empire. Not many years ago their bishops were slain throughout Egypt. Yet

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\* The god Mithra, according to ancient beliefs, representing the powers of light, and partaking of the divine essence, though not of the purest essence of the deity, was born virginally of the rocks, thus assuming earthly being and bringing God closer to man; he was slain for the sins of the world, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. His religion, brought from Persia to Babylon and the older civilizations, was later established in Rome, carried thence through the Roman Empire by the legions, and was the most serious rival to early Christianity. Mithra, in the esoteric sense, was the Divine Logos, “the word,” that emanated from God, sharing in His nature and omnipotence, and who, having fashioned the world, and brought earth-life into being, thereafter ascended to heaven to watch over the earth. In the celebration of his rites bread was broken and partaken of, the significance of this being that it was Mithra’s body divinely broken and offered up for men. The ancient ceremony was much like the Communion of the Christians and the mass as it later evolved. The pagans, marking the striking similarity between the rites of the Christians and those of Mithra, thought the Christians travestied their own sacrament.

methinks there must be some secret truth, some element of vitality in a religion which maketh such an appeal!"

"Bah!" said Mary, scornfully. "They deify a carpenter and thus glorify the common herd; they make saints, or gods, of slaves—and thus appeal to the rabble. 'Tis a religion of the low, the illiterate."

"Well," said Caius, "simply out of curiosity I lately inquired into their teaching. The maxims of their god are certainly not reprehensible, and indeed much resemble certain teachings of Plato."

"Their god forsooth!" laughed Mary. "Thinkest thou a god could come from amongst the Jews?"

"But," said Caius, "they claim he was a prince of Israel."

Mary's mirth rippled softly.

"A god from among the Jews—a prince of Israel! Ha, Ha! Thou art, my good Caius, ineffable. Imagine it, my friend—a god from among that race of usurers and knaves! Imagine such a divinity's ascent to thy Olympus! A Jewish invasion of Elysium! Methinks the cerulean would ring with protest against the paying of taxes! Oh Caius, a god from among the oboli-squeezers! 'Tis singular, though, that the Jews and the Christians hate one another so violently, their alleged deities being related——"

"'Tis the affection of all relationships, human and divine," laughed Caius. "But, ah! Here are thy jewels!"

Two of Caius's slaves appeared bearing a great casket of rosewood, inlaid with massive plates of bronze.

Having unlocked the lid, they retired. Caius proceeded to sing the praises of the gems and to impress Mary with their value as he uncovered the treasure.

"I swear, never have I secured such a bargain—the old Silenus was high in his cups, eager, of course, for favors, and ere he could change his mind I bound hard the bargain! I would say these humble jewels are worthy of any queen—but scarce of thee! Still, if thou wilt deign to wear them——"

Mary moved to and fro indifferently while Caius fondlingly lifted from their soft resting-place great ropes of rubies of huge size, redder than pigeon's blood and imprisoning liquid

fire, rings, hoops of gold ornately encrusted, bracelets and barbaric cup-shaped pieces, flaming crimsonly, for the breasts.

Caius held a rope toward Mary.

"Thou wert speaking of the Patriarch. Hath he of late been paying aught of compliments to me?"

"Somewhat," Caius replied. "Thou knowest the Christians blame thee for the massacre! And they do not forget. As I have told thee heretofore, I have powerful friends both at Constantinople and Rome. Methinks I have successfully averted any trouble the dogs would bring upon thee! Is not this a marvellous stone—methinks it hath life. Thou knowest the geomancers ascribe virtues to jewels. They say that chalcidony giveth courage to its possessor; that the topaz killeth passion, and as such is worn by virgins; that the sapphire imparteth the power of divining, and that the ruby bringeth good luck, inflameth the heart with love, and endueth the wearer with good and noble qualities. 'Tis the most precious and adorable of stones." Caius caressed the gems tenderly. Gloating upon them, he put heavy ropes about Mary's neck, slipped massy hoops upon her arms, bracelets upon her wrists, and rings upon her fingers. Ecstatically clapping his hands, he stood back a pace and gazed upon her, enrapt.

"They contrast with the emeralds superbly. Thou art wonderful! These gems were forged of fire for a goddess!"

"Thou art generous, Caius. I am pleased with thy gift." With only a shade of interest Mary picked up a silver mirror that lay upon a couch and surveyed herself. "As thou wert saying, Caius," she deflected, "the Patriarch hath no love for me—I beg thee to keep thy ears open at the governor's. I am indifferent to the lies of the dogs—indifferent save, were it possible, I should delight to throttle one by one every Christian in Alexandria! Yea, by the gods, that they had but one throat, and that my hands might close about it!" She put down the mirror. "Of late hast thou heard aught of the monks—do they still come into the city?"

She submitted herself further to Caius, who, reaching into the chest, continued loading her with the blood-fiery gems.

"They still come, assault the Jews, and kill the Arians! Last night they burned the house of Silius, an Arian, and

beat with maces the door of the villa of the comedienne Monica! —But this ring, this perfect stone, 'tis carven in the likeness of some strange god——”

“Admirable,” said Mary. “And then—what else? Thou wert speaking of the monks?——”

“One among them went through the streets, shouting denunciations. By Jupiter, father of the gods, mark the fire in this diadem!”

“May hades take thy gems—tell me of the monks!” Mary made an impatient gesture. Disconcerted, Caius dropped the tiara in the casket.

“As for the monks—surely 'tis of no great interest to thee—this morning this madman rushed into the Tribune, haranguing. He made charges against thee! They were absurd—even the magistrate laughed. Whenever he spoke a wild chorus drowned his words. The people are thy friends. Later this madman stood up along the esplanade and addressed a crowd. By the doves of Aphrodite, the jewels become thee . . .”

He placed the tiara on her head and stood admiring.

Mary clenched her hands.

“Knowest thou this monk's name——”

“His name—Oh, divine one, this diadem——”

“His name!” Mary shouted, angrily. “Art thou bereft of thy wits? I would know his name.”

Caius made a deprecating gesture and thought a moment.

“Methinks 'twas Niobides—a monk of some fame—but madder than Phantastus, god of bad dreams! The leader of a band, I am told, who eat rotten oats and are in turn eaten by lice.” He laughed heartily.

“Ah!” Mary gasped, her face contracting. Turning abruptly to Caius she said:

“Come, dear friend! We have been too long. The snow melts—the wine becometh warm! 'Tis cool at the hour of noon in my pavilion. Proceed—I will follow thee.”

Caius reluctantly closed the jewel case and preceded Mary toward the passage leading to the gardens.

“Niobides . . . Niobides,” Mary breathed, trying to quell the tumult of her bosom with her hands. “Niobides! oh



Aphrodite, bear with me—of all men whom I hate, give this madman unto me . . .” Her breath left her.

At the doorway Caius turned, and, extending his arms, feasting his eyes upon her, he dilated upon Mary.

“By the dimpled knees of the Graces, no woman hath ever lived like unto thee! Thou hast the brains of Aspasia, and art soft as Phryne! The milk of Venus fed thee!”

In striking contrast to her iridescently spangled mantle, Mary’s jewels set off her beauty weirdly. Green and ruby flames seemed to dance about her. The crimson-hearted gems on her bosom throbbed as she breathed. Caius vanished toward the pavilion.

Carried away by a sudden paroxysm of rage, Mary clutched the necklace hanging on her bosom and twisted at it with both hands, as if to rip it apart.

“’Tis for these I tolerate yon bloated behemoth! For these—and his protection! Gods, my heart goeth to jelly!”

Caius’s voice called from the passage:

“Glory of Egypt, whither dost thou tarry?”

From the pavilion in the gardens beyond came a Greek boy’s soprano voice singing Anacreon’s “On the Vintage.”

Mary paused as she parted the flaming, bird-embroidered curtains leading from the court.

“Niobides”—she whispered, conjuringly, hoarsely, her eyes greening with a glowering fire—“Niobides! Oh, that I might choke thy insults with kisses, that I might utterly worst thee! Ah!”

“Golden apple of Alexandria!” A flutter of cytheras without drowned Caius’s voice.

Mary’s face convulsed. Her breath came hissing from between her teeth. She wrenched the great ruby necklace with vicious ferocity.

“By hades, this is an abominable business!” she snarled.

Then she stepped forward. The curtains closed behind her.

## IX

MARY's appearances in public were often signalized by stirring ovations. Driving four milk-white Arabian steeds, in whose blood fire seemed intermingled, she would dash through the esplanades in a gilded curricule decorated with chased plates of silver and carved ivory, the wheels bedecked with flowers, beribboned pennons fluttering in the air. Her hands held the reins firmly; her head erect, her nostrils panted with delight in the breathless speed of her horses. Her mantle billowed wing-like in the breeze behind her.

Crowds rushed to the curbs to behold her; men's faces turned even as the flowers of the sun follow Phoebus, their god, through the heavens, after her. Salvos of applause followed in her wake. Thrilled by the fleet vision, men would spend the day dreaming of Mary. She was the subject of gossip, and even legend, in shops, inns, the baths, wherever men foregathered.

Mary more often fared forth in a palatial palanquin of carved cedar ornately enhanced with silver and ivory, as commodious in size as the houses of the poor, its ivory-plated poles borne on the shoulders of eight nude Ethiopians blacker than ebony. Sitting at her feet within, her handmaidens strummed cytheras or chattered with her concerning the scandals of the day. In advance of the litter went fleet-footed runners heralding the approach:

"Mary of Alexandria fareth forth! Make way! Make way!"

Traffic would pause, the crowds part. A thousand fascinated, eager eyes would wait for that face of incomparable world-famed loveliness to peer forth from the peach-colored silken curtains.

"Hail, Mary! Star of the Alexandrian sky! Moon of Mareotis! Rose of Brucheum! Hail! Hail!"

Impressed by her beauty, her power, the wealth of her reputed lovers, the impressionable populace adored Mary. She was the heroine of their sordid lives; she embodied romance to the young women of the poor. The magnificence of her life, the

prodigality of her charity, the fabulous variety and regal splendor of her jewels fascinated their imagination.

From remote regions of Egypt, Arabia, and Syria poor men came to Alexandria on mules and afoot that, some late afternoon when she went forth, they might for once in their lives gaze upon her face.

Before Mary's litter went slave girls, with bodies white as milk, scattering flowers, and lithe, brown-limbed boys, playing lutes and dancing; behind often followed the proud scions of Alexandria's aristocracy, in chariots, litters, and afoot. They sang the odes of the poet Almachus, written in Mary's honor. Beggars joined in the songs. To these the profligate gallants flung handfuls of coin.

When Mary descended to enter the shops of jewellers, perfumers, importers of rare fabrics, or to visit the houses of courtesans, crowds gathered without, waiting for her brief reappearance. Children flung flowers to her; old crones, profiting by the charity of her admirers, shouted blessings. Mary was famed for the lavishness and novelty of her dress; she always appeared in new and astonishing fashions. Indeed, although her freshness and beauty seemed perennially unchanging, her aspect was never exactly the same. Her face changelessly mirrored a personality as multiple in its brilliant facets as a gem.

In the art of adornment her genius was as versatile as it was superb; her toilets, as Caius Marcellus said, were truly wonderful.

There is an obscure legend concerning Helen of Troy to the effect that to whomsoever looked upon her she appeared in that guise of beauty most admired and desired. In the protean mirror of her luminous countenance soldiers beheld the fulfilled allure that had spurred them in battle; bereaved husbands and lovers, the transfigured faces of those who had gone into the Cimmerian shades; and painters, poets, dreamers, the incarnation of that archetypal beauty which broods beyond the world of reality. Embracing the variable loveliness of the universe, Helen was all women to all men. Within her perfect body throbbed the heart-and-pulse beat of all women's passions, of all women's generous gifts of loving. The world

desired Helen. And in her time, resembling Helen thus, all Alexandria desired Mary.

Concerning Mary the wildest gossip was rife. Among the ignorant, legends were fabricated concerning her. There was much infamous scandal. 'Twas said among the superstitious that, as Helen of Troy, Mary could miraculously envisage her countenance into that type most appealing to her lovers; that by certain enchantments she could, like the chameleon, change the hue of her complexion from the pallor of the camomile to the glow of the hibiscus blossom; alter her stature by a mere effort of will, and change the color of her eyes. The poet Almachus had written many poems about Mary's eyes—within those luminous lairs, he declared, abode the basilisk allure, the sombre gold and purple magic of her soul, which could grip, in a spell hypnotic and irresistible, a thousand men. They were abysses of enchantment in which the reason of men was engulfed, in which souls perished. Peradventure Almachus was not wrong. Countless men knew beyond denial that when Mary turned her gaze upon them they were held enthralled, and that, under the bewitchment of her glance, they surrendered to thoughts and desires which, if they were Christians, they hastened to confess, or, if they were pagans and husbands, they as zealously concealed from their wives.

The rumor was current that genii attended Mary's toilet, acquainted her with the secrets of altering the guise of her beauty, and that they compounded philtres that gave her undiminished potency in inspiring love. The Christians knew that she held constant traffic with the Prince of Darkness himself. Satan was her paramour.

They said Mary preserved a factitious youth by absorbing the vitality of her victims; that, in their sleep, her kisses drew blood from her lovers. As the years had passed, leaving her unalterably lovely, the conviction spread even beyond the Christian quarters that Mary was a vampire, and throughout the city the ignorant believed that in secret she dealt in baleful sorceries.

While the *polloi* indulged in preposterous canards concerning her, those given the privilege of visiting Mary's house—in

her protean variety of toilets, her amazing and contrasting variations of appearance and demeanor, as well as in a spontaneous vivacity alternating with sombre spells of melancholy—found constant surprise and an infinite gamut of enchanting impressions. Such was the charm of Mary that she had mastered the technic of beauty of all ages, the histrionic arts as well as all the theories and methods of love. These indeed she knew as perfectly as those priestesses of Venus Astarte who, in seven classes, during many years, studied the secrets of caresses and erotic pleasures in the school of the temple built by Ptolemy I. Mary realized the mercurial changefulness of the tastes of men. She enamoured more than all women of her age because by instinct she divined the nature and desires of those whose gifts were ample. She came always to them in that guise of beauty most desired. For she had not, in her girlhood with the aged courtesan, read into the legend concerning Helen of Troy for naught.

By virtue of her knowledge and genius, Mary sometimes appeared as a maiden of most tender years, her untinted skin pellucidly pale, her golden hair, bound by a fillet, arranged simply; her eyes averted under coyly drooping lids, most naïve—shy, timid, reluctant. She could even bring blushes to her cheeks.

In startling contrast, clothed in white Grecian robes hemmed with silver, austere, she could be as icily forbidding as the Olympian Pallas. Her height seemed increased. Anointed with a bleaching cosmetic made of bean powder, and washed with milk, her skin possessed the glistening pallor of marble; her breasts seemed frozen into rigidity, her very lips were subdued to an unnatural paleness. In the clasp of lovers her hands lacked warmth. Cold, luminously beautiful, repelling, unresponsive to their maddest kisses, there were those who, loving as did Charmides, delighted to woo her thus. In winning her they seemed to warm with reluctant ardor some chill, majestic Athene. Because she pleased them, these gave fabulous gifts to Mary.

Her skin browned with the juices of nuts, swathed in the fantastic garb of elder Egypt, close-clinging as sumptuous cerements, Mary resurrected the beauty of those dead princesses

of elder times whose mummies lay in the tombs and whose ghosts moaned unrequited love laments on moonlit nights to the monks who inhabited their graves. Her eyes were painted until they resembled glazed beads of agate; the brows and lashes were dyed to a bitter black with attar of roses and kohl; fine lines traced about the corners made them appear inordinately large. Mary's dusky cheeks glowed with a rare ointment extracted from the body of the crocodile; the dimples in her chin and on her elbows were accentuated with tracings of carmine. Strange musty odors, suggestive of dried dead flowers, exhaled from her robes. From her knees to her ankles was painted a fluttering fall of flower-petals. On her breasts great scarabæi clustered. About her head she wore the serpent diadem of Isis. Sometimes, appearing thus, she danced the dances of olden time. Her body undulated on her hips; her breasts expanded; the painted beetles moved their wings. Bells tinkled on her ankles. There were those who, in their veins pulsing the moribund blood of old ages and passions, would prostrate themselves before Mary and cover her feet with idolatrous kisses.

Mary's toilet was a thing of mystery, secret and sacred. There were women in Alexandria who would have given a fortune to learn the esoteric arts imparted by Aphrodite the divine to her priestess. Upon her perfect body Mary changed the hue from amber unto the blue whiteness of milk; from the pallor of ashes and lilies to the glow of the Nile nymphæus. Treated first with a solution of saffron and gum arabic, Mary's hair was powdered with fine gold, giving it the rich lustre of burnished copper; or with a dust of peculiar composition which imparted the opaline iridescence of peacock plumes; or with pulverized diamonds and pearls which dimmed its tawnniness under a silvery film resembling glistening snow. With Egyptian red, pale carmine, saffron, and gold Mary enhanced the tempting allure of her breasts. Upon them budded great flowers, the petals of deepest scarlet. Or they resembled great apples, or ripe-yellow pink-flushed pomegranates. Sometimes upon their blue-veined bleached whiteness were painted miniature bacchic dances, of piping Pans, leaping fauns, and racing satyrs, in silhouette; again, mystic traceries in gold suggesting

the hidden delights of love. Even as they were painted, Mary's breasts, ears, lips, and finger-tips were sweetened with erotygenuous unguents that they might be delectable to kisses. After her bath Mary's body, smooth as polished alabaster, was softened by masseurs and anointed with oils in which were macerated the petals of insidious flowers and ointments more precious than silver—aloes from the East; cumin from Greece, spike-nard from India, and male-incense from Arabia. Under her arms was rubbed Cleopatra's favorite unguent, a rare balsam from Palestine. Mary's flesh became sweeter than the pith of mandrake apples; her fingers, delectably flavored with distilled essences of willow-flower, rose or musk, inebriated those whose lips tasted their tips. When she walked, her body exhaled soft odors as a garden of many flowers. In the blending of her perfumes, so 'twas said, were employed the dangerous arts of magic. There were those who swooned into irid trances and experienced insupportable delight in Mary's embrace.

In the art of acting Mary surpassed the most celebrated comediennes. At the close of banquets she occasionally performed pantomimes for her guests, portraying the notable and notorious women of legend and history. She enacted Electra frenziedly inspiring Orestes to vengeance; Asbyte, the Amazon warrior woman beloved of Hannibal; Circe, horribly enchanting her lovers. Mary depicted Messalina, devoured by her fevers; Phædra, Plagnon, Myrto, and Poppæa, enraptured with the odor of blood in the arena and the incense of martyrs perishing in flames. Her performance of the abject surrender of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, before Aurelian, was startling in conveying the utter horridness of this great but fallen queen's abasement and treachery. In realistically representing Semiramis the terrible she would order her slaves flogged; her atrium rang with terrible wailings. Among her lovers there were some who would then grovel before her, begging her to flay them with scourges. Incomparably she re-created, so that momentarily she lived, loved, and died beneath the asp's kiss again, Cleopatra, that tawny queen of a Roman heart.

Only on rare occasions, when the heat of wine reddened her brain or the face of some stranger, perplexingly desirable, gazed from among her guests, did Mary dance. In those savage

saturnalias of motion she focussed the leaping lightning-fires of all human passions, frenzies, despairs, and madnesses. Gazing upon her, men lost their breath, all sense of place and time. Their veins flowed with lava. Their brains were pricked with swords.

Overcome by exhaustion, Mary sometimes swooned at the close of her dance; or, demented by the unassuaged, intensified hysteria of heart and pounding arteries, she would abandonedly embrace the one who most pleased her, beat him with her jewelled fists, and in maniac frenzy bruise him with the enervating rage of her lips.

In her own life Mary was no less the artiste than when she histrionically entertained her guests. More difficult because of the necessity of concealing them under the semblance of reality, in herself Mary's gifts of simulation and artistry found their surpassing triumph.

In public Mary preserved an austere remote, disdainfully haughty demeanor. She seemed literally apart from the world in which she moved. At all moments conscious of herself and her surroundings, she lived vitally, observantly, through the media of every sense. Mistress of herself, mistress of the trade of beauty and amorous enchantment, Mary comprehended absolutely, perfectly, how—by attitude, manner, the employment of lips and eyes, by even imperceptible gradations of gesture—she could influence men's minds, stir their emotions, and excite their imaginations. The game of it all thrilled her. Realizing both the infinite extent and the limited scope of her power upon men, never did Mary cease intently, deliberately, and self-consciously to play her consummately-mastered part. Women, no less than men, devoured her with their gaze; enviously, jealously, they assiduously studied her toilets, her methods of dressing her hair, her garments, her deportment. They sought to learn how she excelled in that most difficult of all accomplishment—the withholding of age, the preserving of beauty, and the subjugation of men. They sought to find fault; there was much petty waspish cavilling. But even when they bitterly criticised her they gave her unconscious tribute.

In a poem Almachus had declared that Mary's body respired and pulsed with the movement of the stars. Her movements



were as fluent, as ineffably blended as notes of music flowing into harmony. When Mary languishingly lifted her arms she described graceful curves as perfect as the contour of Grecian marbles. Her postures would have delighted Phidias. Even to the movement of her fingers, sometimes recalling the falling of white flower-petals by moonlight; even to the slightest drooping of her eyelashes, as ineffably soft as vapors drifting over stars, did Mary exercise her art. Her lips framed kisses when she spoke; her slightest movement was eloquent. Her eyes roved over vast assemblages with the luminous wonder, the magical glamour, of the distantly soaring moon.

Entering the Hippodrome, Mary floated rather than walked. She passed as softly as mists fall at twilight; as the dawn, glitteringly silent, creeps over the desert; as moonbeams furtively steal amid terebinth trees. Watching her, men held their breath in a suspense of admiration and sheer rapture. Their heads involuntarily turned as she passed. It was then that, overburdened, desiring, despairing, an audible sigh would rise.

Apparently unconscious of the effect of her appearance, Mary, with affected indifference, would encompass the amphitheatre of faces. Thousands of eyes feasted with unabashed gluttony upon her. A thousand men, experiencing a delight unknown before, visually possessed her. That, in sooth, she was mistress of men's imagination in Alexandria, Mary did not fail fully to realize. But, although her nostrils sometimes distended with the intoxicating sense of her power and the pride of her beauty, Mary was ever unappeased, discontented, restless, unrequitedly seeking, and of all the women who envied her, of all the men who suffered pangs of desire because of her, none was at times so desolately lonely, so tormentedly dissatisfied and weary of soul, so inconsolably unhappy as she.

## X

MARY came from her bath. She had risen late, the noon hour had long passed, and the plunge in the great pool had refreshed her. The marble pavement was gratefully cool beneath her feet. The water dripped like liquid opals from her gleaming flesh.

The chamber which Mary entered, that sacrosanct sanctuary of Venus where were performed the sacraments of her toilet, was huge and luxuriously appointed. The walls were of rose-onyx, with niches containing statues of exquisite grace, the doors and recesses hung with tapestries of flesh-colored satin-silk, the frieze decorated with voluptuous paintings in warm colors. The ceiling was of white cedar inlaid with mother-of-pearl and laceries of silver. In the centre of the roof was a vast sheet of unflawed rock crystal, over which rained constantly a fountain of water, and through which the glaring African sun shone with a cool-tempered brilliance. Facing the doorway was a life-sized figure of the Anadyomene, nude, of translucent alabaster. The face of the image was the immortalized face of Mary. Along the walls in large urns were blooming flowers—jasmine, lotus lilies, irises, and dwarf orange trees. In golden cages little yellow birds sang. Fumes of myrrh lazily rose from silver tripods. The floor was covered with flesh-soft silken rugs. At one end, in a bay, was Mary's couch, of cedar wood set with tortoise shell, the legs of crocodile heads; over the head was a canopy of white peacock feathers with iridescent eyes.

Mary stood in silence while her two slaves, lissom negresses with crisp, frizzled hair, dried her with a sponge. Then she sank into a chair of ivory bathed in the full flood of mellow sunlight.

"My mirror," she said.

One brought an antique mirror of burnished silver, the rim ornately carved with chasing satyrs. It was Mary's cherished treasure and had once reflected the beauty of Cleopatra.

"Horus! Horus!" she called. The panther, sleeping by her couch, yawned, and, purring loudly, crept across the floor

to Mary's feet. Her toes clenched in the soft yielding velvet of its coat.

One of the slaves dried her hair with a coarse towel, then spread it out, separating the tangled threads and fanning it. Her hair waved and floated, and in the radiance pouring from the crystal roof reflected a rich coppery sheen. While it was stiffened with pomatum and twisted on her head, the heavy liquid metallic coils, like golden snakes, being fastened with pins, Mary held the mirror at arm's length and murmured as if to herself:

"My hair is a maze of magic wherein men dream tawny dreams. There was once a Titan woman who came from the regions of the gods in a chariot that rode the sky. Her head was aflame with the colors of amber and ruby and garnet."

Trained in chanting rhapsodies in praise of their mistress' beauty, as was the custom of slaves as they attended lovely and loved women during their toilet, one of the negresses responded:

"Less red than her hair are the fadeless palampores of India, less purple the dyes of Tyre."

Mary continued:

"The seas blushed as the cheeks of a maiden; the clouds became ensanguined as the banners of armies proclaiming her glory. The earth as a crucible warmed in the heat of her ardor and burst forth in flowers, roses, and poppies, and fields green and crimson. Birds followed in flight, and the silence was broken by the sound of their singing. Thus fared forth Aurora, goddess of morning."

"Thus, fairest of women, as the light of the dawn, the wine of the sunset, is the crown of thy hair."

A slave scraped her with a strigil. Mary stood erect, her body tall as a column, lustrous, incomparable. Both slaves massaged her with oil of almonds, then dried her, rubbing into her satin skin the exquisite essences of saffron flowers and jasmine. While they gently rubbed her, Mary's voice purled rhythmically:

"My body is a tower of ivory with turrets of mother-of-pearl. Am I a creature of clay? Am I born but to die? I

am the temple of a goddess—" almost defiantly, she flung forth both arms, and her piled hair flamed a rich nimbus. "My body is the temple of her, the Immortal One, whose breath fructifies the earth! Yea, I bear within me the water and fire that vitalize the universe! I bear within me light, sound, perfumes, the music of theorbos and lyres! I am the color of flowers and of the shells of the sea! My spirit, one with my Mother, clothes barren spaces with crocuses and tulip bloom and golden wheat. I am the song of birds. I am the wings of their flight! I am the gladness of butterflies that live upon dew and flutter with pinions of velvet, of yellow and scarlet. I am the dream of Endymion! I am the sweetness that leavens the earth! I am beauty—I am desire—I am love!

"Thus have the poets sung of me!"

She sank luxuriously into the ivory chair.

"Let Doria come. Bring the bonbons of myxare!"

One of the negresses went to summon the Christian maiden, while the other brought a casket of lapis lazuli. Mary nibbled at a confection indifferently, then flung a handful to the purring panther. The slave placed the casket on a low stand by her side.

Doria presently entered with a tray of ebony containing the mystic chemistry of Mary's toilet—dry pigments, oils, fats, and brushes. While Mary kneaded the voluptuous skin of the panther with her pink toes, the girl bleached her face with a white pigment until the smooth brow gleamed like alabaster.

Mary closed her eyes. Doria rubbed a blue powder on the lids. With a camel's-hair brush she beaded Mary's long lashes with jet, and with crayons heightened and lengthened the eyebrows. With a stylus she gently tinted the corners of the eyes on either side of the delicate bridge of the nose with spots of carmine, and with a fine pencil traced an almost imperceptible line from the outer corners. Thus were Mary's eyes accentuated and deepened.

Lifting the mirror before her, Mary dreamed:

"My eyes are dim green forest pools wherein nymphs sigh for the beauty of their face!"

"Thine eyes are Circe-spells that enchant the world!"

Her cheeks were rubbed with a carmine powder until they

glowed with the lustre of sea-shells; her ears were delicately incarnadined. Her lips were painted with vermilion. The girl, Doria, withdrawing a step, surveyed her, and—as she had been taught—chanted perfunctorily, with sadness in her voice:

“Thy lips are red as the Nile flower wherein bees become inebriate with honey. Thy lips are the pith of pomegranates cooled by snows brought from the mountains.”

One of the negresses took up the chant:

“Thy mouth is a ruby cup foaming with wines more potent than those of Shiraz and Kismische. Beneath thy tongue is a fountain sweeter than the waters of Istakahar, more refreshing than the sherbets of Persia.”

The second black:

“The world’s delight nestles within thy mouth.”

“And I—I am weary,” sighed Mary, “of the world’s delight.”

The ebon-skinned servitors sang:

“The winds that blow from Amathea are not sweeter than thy breath.”

With a brush Doria tinted her breasts.

“Thy breasts are the bosoms of doves, washed with milk. Thy breasts are pillows for the weary.”

Gazing downward upon herself Mary murmured:

“Between the white mountains of my bosom is a vale of pleasant dreams.”

Languishingly she outstretched both arms. Doria tinted the dimples of the elbows.

Beneath the ivory skin branched the sapphire-tendrilled veins.

The two black women chanted:

“Thy arms are gates of alabaster to the gardens of delight. Unto thy demesne come men from over the seven seas, from beyond the mountains of Kaf. Unto thy sheltered pavilion come pilgrims from the ends of the earth. Unto thee come men with white hair from the North; their kisses are cool as the snows of high mountains. Unto thee come men with golden skin and eyes like enamel, from lands where the white peacock preens its wings amid the eucalyptus trees. Unto thee come princes with hair like coarse grasses, riding upon elephants

with painted ears, caparisoned with nets of gold. Unto thee come Ethiopian kings with burnt skins; their hair is curly as black moss; they are as simple as children. Unto thee come men whose kisses sting like whips and whose hands dig into thy throat. Unto thee come men gentle and tender as women. Unto thy pavilion each brings the pearl of a secret."

Mary's words came like a sigh:

"The gardens are faint with heat; of my pilgrims am I weary. Beyond all women am I wise."

"Thy pilgrims have left a haunting sweetness upon thy lips. Unto thee have been unveiled hidden mysteries; the secrets of Elephantis have been revealed unto thee. From the Ganges where the gymnosophists dream have rajahs brought unto thee formulæ for conjuring agonies of rapture sustained beyond human bearing. Unto thee hath been given the vase of Pandora."

Mary said musically:

"Jewels of rapture and poisons that consume. Joy! Confusion! Despair! Yea, and the cause of all mortal sorrow."

"Within the veils of thy temple is the seat of the universe," muttered one of the Ethiops.

Mary's face gloomed.

"In the streets the Christians revile me. I am the abomination of desolation! Their insults sting me."

The second black quickly answered:

"Children sing songs in praise of thee."

Doria burnished Mary's finger-nails with a pad of leather.

"Thy hands are silver doves that mate among the apple trees. The night is tender with the sound of their cooing, and pink blossoms fall to the ground."

Kneeling, Doria laced upon her feet sandals trimmed with humming-bird wings.

"Thy feet are gulls that wing white over seas that are green."

"My feet," said Mary, "bear circlets of pearls divers bring from the sea."

Phials of perfume were brought; her body was scented.

"The poets write songs in praise of me; they are sung by girls at eve on the jetty." Mary smiled wistfully. "I am

Thais of Athens commanding the burning of Persepolis! I am Myrto and Plagnon! I am Leileh, most beautiful maid of the Arabians, beloved by Megnoun the poet, verses in praise of whose beauty all the Orient abounds! Helas! All poets are liars."

The blacks exclaimed:

"Thou art Aphrodite. Thou art Helen. Thou art Phryne. Thou art Eunnoia, daughter of god, whose love drowns the sins of the world."

Turning the mirror this way and that, Mary surveyed herself. A smile parted her lips.

"What if the Christians insult me! What if the dogs hate me! The fame of my beauty, verily, is a great light in the world."

The two slaves in unison sang:

"Thy beauty is as the sunshine and the rain. Thy loveliness refreshes the earth. Thou art the glory of Egypt. Thou art the desire of the world. Those that love thee go forth rejoicing; their life is sweet as the milk and the honeycomb. In hours of trouble thy memory is balm to their hearts. In far oceans when storms beset them thou art the star that guides men's ships. In the burning deserts where the caravans wander the thought of thy lips is a spring of sweet water unto them that thirst. In dying, those who loved thee invoke thy name, glad, having loved thee, that they lived."

To herself Mary mused:

"And I—I know no peace. Gods! I am as the caravan that finds no shade and no water. I am the ship that is tossed without compass. And yet—I am glad that I live."

She studied her face in the mirror.

"We are born in the morning, and in the evening go to our graves," she mused, slowly, reflectively. She sighed: "Ah, shall we not drink of the fountains of kisses? Shall we not eat of the fruit of all pleasure? Or shall we cast sand in our eyes and flee with faces to the ground? Life is brief. Yea, all passes. Death overtakes us—death alone shall we not escape. Beauty and love are eternal. Aphrodite ruleth forever. Winters shall come and green springs; doves will mate in the apple trees. The spirit of the goddess within me shall pass

on, perchance—but the beauty that is the glory of Egypt, the desire of the world, this vessel of clay . . . in a night, in a day, that shall be no more.”

Impatiently she flung the mirror away.

“Yea, while I live I shall love! I am beloved and admired. The power of my beauty is greater than that of the dog of a Patriarch. I fear him not!” Turning to Doria, “My jewels.” Between them the two blacks, staggering under its weight, brought a massive coffer of ivory. They drew back the ponderous lid. A sudden outburst of iridescent fire blazed forth, lighting the chamber with dancing, scintillant reflections, and playing over Mary’s coldly white body with a multi-colored warmth.

With outstretched hands Mary bent over the coffer, shimmering and leaping like a magical garden of flame. In the depths of her burnished hair played the reflected light of rubies; in her eyes the liquid green-gleam of emeralds, on her reaching arms the frigid, actinic white flash of diamonds. Within the coffer stirred as living things necklaces of rubies, emeralds, and peach-colored pearls; wrist-bands and arm-hoops of beryl, jade, chalcedony, coral, and chrysolite; apodemes of agate, lapis lazuli, and topaz; girdles of strung sapphires and carved turquoises; anklets dangling with onyx, jasper, and jacinth; brooches set with great amethysts, carbuncles, and opals; ear-rings, curiously carved, representing winged creatures, studded with a myriad tiny gems, and, serpentine, triple-horned, and crescent-shaped, ruby and diamond diadems. Within the satin-lined pit palpitated the ransom of a queen, the treasure of the mythical cave of the jinn. The two negresses, drawing away, made a low obeisance. Doria waited.

“Which wilt thou wear, mistress?”

The smile had faded from Mary’s face; her eyelids drooped, dazzled and very wearied. She sank back on her chair, and with one hand over her mouth yawned softly. As if satiated by the sight, she waved her hand.

“I will wear flowers.”

The two slaves, rising, closed and locked the coffer. With bodies bent, they dragged it away.



"My clothes," Mary commanded. Doria brought from an ebony chest a garment of amethyst tissue hemmed with spangles.

"No," said Mary, shaking her head.

Doria presented a diaphanous green robe embroidered with gaudily-plumaged birds.

"I go out—to the jewellers—dress-makers," Mary spoke impatiently. "Not that."

She finally rose and let the girl drape her in a robe of pale gray vividly splashed with great sprays of the Nile nymphæus, redder than blood. The garment trailed in long folds behind her. In her hair the slave placed a garland of half-opened hibiscus buds, vivid as girls' mouths. Mary fanned herself indolently with an osprey plume.

"What is the hour?" she asked. As one of the blacks was about to depart, there were three raps at the door. The slave whose duty it was to announce guests appeared. Philamon, the great corn merchant, awaited. Mary expressed unfeigned surprise.

"Bring him hither," said she radiantly. "Hath yon dotard, yon mummy, lost his interest in the propaganda of Theophilus? But what meaneth his visit? What can he desire? I swear——"

It was only rarely that Mary permitted any one to enter that sanctuary. On her face was an enigmatic smile. Dismissing Doria and the negresses, she lifted her mirror and surveyed herself.

"Greetings, Philamon!"

At the door Philamon stopped abruptly. Whatever memory the intimate insidious perfumes conjured, Philamon uttered a prayer. A Christian, he knew he had entered a perilous abode of sin.

"Greetings, woman," he answered gruffly. Philamon was an old man, his head bald as an ostrich egg, with a long gray beard and rapacious eyes. He wore a tunic of plain linen. His cadaverous fingers opened and closed with an uncannily grasping gesture.

"I am truly honored to receive so distinguished a guest." Mary's voice was liquid with cajoling irony. "Hast thou

grown weary of the sour wine of thy sacraments? Seat thyself."

The old man moved forward, looking about with unconcealed curiosity and horror. He spoke tersely:

"'Tis not pleasure that enforces a visit so repugnant, but the duty of a Christian father to his son."

Mary smiled tolerantly.

"Ah, 'tis true, then, as report goes, that thou hast become a Christian?"

"Verily, have I become a Christian. I will be brief with thee." Philamon spoke sharply. "I have endeavored as a father to teach my son the futility of earthly things, and the only true worth of the life everlasting. I would save his soul from the burning pit into which his infatuation for thee would lead him. Therefore have I come to ask what will mean nothing to thee—but much to a Christian father who would save his son. My words are of no avail, but, if thou wilt, thou canst send him from thee. Refuse Cyprian thy house. I will not be otherwise than frank with thee, for I am a practical man. I know thou art mercenary, and if thou doest what I ask I will pay thee generously."

While he spoke Mary observed herself in Cleopatra's mirror, leisurely preening the ringlets of her hair.

She burst into a ripple of laughter. The old man started.

"Why dost thou laugh?" he asked roughly.

"By the gods, life is not without its humor, my good Philamon! 'Twas not so many years ago thou wert willing to pay goodly sums to visit me. Now thou wouldst pay me to deny the pleasure thou didst so earnestly seek to thy insipid son! Verily, 'tis conclusive the gods have wit!"

"For those days I have bowed my head in penitence and have donned the sackcloth of the spirit. The past have I put behind me. I was dead in my sins, but I am alive again! I have found the new life which is eternal!"

Impatiently Mary tossed the mirror upon the couch. She laughed harshly.

"Thou withered husk of a melon! Thou pratest of a new life! Look into yon mirror! A senile gallant is ever absurd, Philamon, but of all the decrepit fools in Alexandria thou wert

the most ridiculous. Methinks thou shouldst bury thy past! And thou hast donned the sackcloth of the spirit and risen from the dead, indeed!" Her voice rasped with scorn. "Eternal life! Thou art a sad specimen of thy Christian resurrection! But tell me, Philamon, wilt thou be content in thy Elysium? Or dost thou expect to commerce in rain-moulded corn there and cheat thy Elysian customers?"

The old man interjected sharply:

"I came to speak to thee about my son. Furthermore, I am prepared to settle with thee now for any sum that seemeth reasonable."

Mary's cheeks flushed.

"Thou drivelling hypocrite, thinkest thou I have corrupted thy son!" she sneered. "Forsooth I have insulted him long since and endeavored to drive him from my house! Now, by the gods, thou insulting wretch, methinks I shall change my mind. Thou canst keep thy money. My nostrils could bear the stench of naught that belonged to a Christian."

Mary sank gracefully upon the couch and watched him, half-indignant, half-amused.

"Ah, thou art headstrong in thy pride! Blind in thy folly, perchance thou knowest not that divine justice any day may smite thee! Alexandria hath too long suffered thee, and will soon wipe thy scarlet sins from her."

"Thou threatenest me?" Mary's sarcasm was soft.

"The kingdom of the Cross marches triumphantly—thou shalt be trodden under foot!"

"Thou didst always love to boast," Mary drawled. "I suppose thou referrest to thy influence with the governor and at the court of that imperial ass, Theodosius. I fear thee not, thou bag of wind, nor thy mangy Patriarch. The people of Alexandria sing my praises in the streets. I tell thee I have no fear of thy zealots. Let them attack my house as they have the houses of others and, by the gods, they will manure Alexandria's gardens! Perchance thou hast forgotten the justice I had my part in bringing upon thy audacious helots not very long ago."

Philamon's eyes blazed.

"Thou hast sown dragon's teeth. Thou shalt reap a whirlwind. Thy day of accounting is nigh upon thee!"

"As ever thou art a tradesman, Philamon; how thou lovest to bully!"

Raising one arm, Philamon threatened her:

"Let not thy pride and folly blind thee to the retribution that awaiteth thee. Though thou mockest me, as a Christian I bear thee no malice. The city of Alexandria hath stunk too long with thy infamies. Unless thou take heed in time, thou shalt be trodden under foot. Thou shalt be crushed to powder. The Cross sheds its light over Alexandria, aye, unto the darkest regions of the earth. Those of thy kind who are given to abominations and uncleanness will be wiped out as by a burning whirlwind. They will call upon the night to cover them and the earth to devour them. Thou canst not escape! Unless—unless—" He paused, and the lids of his eyes, like slimy veils, drooped, not hiding the insinuating, threatening leer. "I have influence," he whispered, "not only with those to whom the powers of the Church upon earth are given, but with the representatives of the noble Emperor, yea even unto Byzantium. I say this. I love my son. I would bring him to the Church and be baptized. I find him obdurate. Serve me in this, and I will therefore promise thee not only such gold as thou canst ask in reason, but more—what is worth more than gold to thee—my influence. Should the wrath of the righteous descend upon thee, I will see that thou meet no undue violence. Shouldst thou be brought to the bar of justice, I will see that the verdict of the court be tempered with mercy. I am done. I ask thee to reconsider well my request. Refuse to see my son, turn him away from thee, yea, even turn his infatuation to rancor by coldness and insults, I care not how—only send him back to me, that I may unfold the word of life to him. I promise thee that, hating thy abominations as a Christian, I will nevertheless as a Christian protect thee."

Mary rose to her full height.

"Thou shrivelled boaster! Thou rag of a man! Thou darest threaten me—me—*me*! By the fury of the gods, I wonder thy words do not choke in thy throat!" She paced to and fro, laughing harshly. "Thou darest threaten me with the wrath of thy lice-ridden bishop! Thou wouldst urge him to be temperate! Indeed! Yea, thou darest even

threaten me with arrest! Arrest—and thou wilt see justice tempered with mercy! Thou comest here, to my house, and thou darest, with paltry disguise, to tell me thou canst, if thou wilt, have me thrown into prison. Thou comest to ask me to refuse to see thy weak-minded son, and thou insultest me with thy offers of money. Wert thou acquainted with politeness, and a man of honor, I should gladly have acceded to thy wish. But always did I know thou hadst a craven spirit, that thou wert a cheater and rascal in business, a bully as well as a knave at heart! But this is insufferable! As though I needed aught of thy protection, thou conceited ostrich; as though I would submit to be favored by a creature I despise so utterly as thee! Hades take thee! I have no fear of thy absurd influence, thy unwashed rabble, thy scurvy Patriarch, thy carrion-army of Nitria! As for thee——” She looked out of the casement at the sun going down, then in a low voice said: “By the gods, I have permitted thee to stay too long; the hour grows late, and my jewellers wait.”

She flung a mantle about her and, clapping her hands, summoned a slave.

“Show the excellent Philamon, our guest, to the street.”

She turned to Philamon, her face composed.

“I have permitted thee to tarry overlong, my friend. Of old, when I had less taste, thou wouldst for so long a period of my time have paid much of thy coin. But as fulsome and unsavory as then were thy kisses, even so despicable and pitiful now are thy threats. As for thy son, until now he was of no interest whatever to me. Possessing all thy ungainly characteristics, he however lacketh thy insolent audacity and knavish wit! He is a simpleton and idiot, and I would have been rid of him long since. But now, if by favoring him I can withhold him from becoming one with thy abominable faith, methinks such is my duty! Aye!” She laughed softly, “As thou art so eager to take him to thy Christ, I may perchance amuse myself by preserving him for Aphrodite.”

Taking her parasol, of sheeny silk hung with golden bells, Mary, bowing with taunting mockery, passed from the room. Shaking his fist and fuming with rage, Philamon followed the slave to the street.

That evening a number of gamesters gathered in the court of Mary's house. Including the richest spendthrifts of the city, among them, senselessly intoxicated, was Cyprian, son of Philamon. A gladiator and a charioteer, great-muscled men, with lustrously white oiled skins, handsome as Apollo and strong as Hercules, had come fresh from the games. Both had won victories, large purses, and were the city's heroes for a day. They delighted Mary. Ordering a sumptuous repast to be served in her garden pavilion, Mary retired with them. As the evening progressed, the influx of visitors increased.

It was a curiously motley assemblage that gathered at Mary's house. Reclining on divans, near the fountain and opposite to where the group of profligates drank wine and gambled, were a half-dozen men, all middle-aged except one who was venerably hoary with years. Three were noted exponents of Neo-Platonism, one a mathematician who held that the destiny of men is determined by the stars, and another a famed teacher of rhetoric in one of the Alexandrian schools. Two were discussing gravely the Ten Predicaments of Aristotle concerning the elements which result in the visible phenomena of man. The others were gravely arguing as to whether the majority of men, the rabble, possessed souls. Three contended the *polloi* were one with animals, minerals, and plants. The eldest upheld that all human beings contain a spark of the divine within them which, by their cultivating thoughts of the beautiful, the pure, and the good, will, in the course of successive reincarnations, at last be freed of the trammels of matter, and be absorbed into the Divine Nothingness, the Unconscious Reason, the All-Soul of the Universe.

Sometimes the disputants lost their cultivated restraint, and in contradicting one another their voices rose to loud shouts. While they talked of God, the soul, and the nature of man, they were served plenteously with wine.

Walking about, conversing with the Libyan beauties, making love to the Athenian singers or the Greek dancers, were several rich Byzantine merchants who dealt in Alexandria, the owner of a glass factory, two Roman generals accompanied by several favorite soldiers, a former senator, a shipmaster who had explored the known seas, a Chaldean astrologer who had

amassed a fortune by playing upon the credulity of the rich women of the city, a silk merchant from China, a trader just returned from India; a Parsee, gorgeously clothed, from Persia; three Brahmins from the Ganges, a number of celebrated comedians—favorites of the theatres—a half-dozen athletes of repute, and young men of various nationalities, from Italy, Greece, Thracia, Syria, who spent their youth in squandering their wealth. The guests were served with wine, honey-cakes, and sherbets. For their amusement glee-girls danced.

During lulls in the animated conversation could be heard the voices of the Athenian choir in Mary's pavilion in the gardens singing exquisitely an ode of Anacreon. Now and then all joined their voices in calling for Mary:

"Whither hath the sun gone? Where tarriest the moon? Mary, light of the day, come unto us! Mary, Queen-Star of the night, dispel the gloom with the golden ray of thy smile!"

The hours passed; midnight approached. The calls for her presence became louder.

While uproarious cries arose for Mary's presence, Almachus, the most celebrated poet in Alexandria and a familiar figure on the esplanade, entered, leaning upon the shoulder of a blonde slave-boy. Slight in stature, Almachus walked with an effeminately mincing step. His face, boorish in contour, was puffy and mottled with excesses. His hair, damply yellow, was bound by a band of gaudy colored silk. Almachus greatly admired the Emperor Nero, and was quoted as saying that his three inspirations were Plato, Nero, and Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of the Nazarene carpenter. In imitation of the harlequin emperor of Rome, Almachus went about holding before his eyes a sort of lorgnette, set with two huge imitation emeralds. Nero had carried one emerald before his eye. Almachus strove painstakingly to outdo all his predecessors in poses, absurdities of manner and obscenities of verse. Whenever he addressed any one, Almachus leered impudently through the green stones with salaciously insinuating questionings. The green glasses, rather than enhancing his appearance, magnified his bead-like, watery-blue eyes. His protruding negroid lips were painted; his sallow cheeks rouged. In the egregiousness of his dress he eclipsed even the decadent

sartorial excesses of the dandies of Rome. He wore a wine-colored tunic, heavily embroidered at the hem with purple grapes, and a pink mantle bespangled with crystals and imitation emeralds. About his neck he wore ropes of semi-precious stones—necklaces, he boasted, given him by women whom he had won. His arms, wrists, and fingers were loaded with spurious gems. In his left hand he held a lotus lily, which he delicately inhaled. He never appeared on the streets of Alexandria without a lily in his hand—these he claimed were gathered daily on the Nile near the spot where Antinous, the favorite of Hadrian, had been drowned. Almachus was always accompanied by his slave-boy, who carried his poems, written on strips of papyrus rolled on a bone cylinder and bound in purple and gold. Almachus was notorious as the favorite of several infamous aged women of great wealth who maintained him in an expensive villa near the park of cypresses; he appeared at all banquets, where he recited his poems, and daily promenaded the esplanade, hectically arrayed, amid cheers and jeers. Almachus had blatantly proclaimed himself to be a grandson of the Emperor Constantine. The rumor went, however, that his grandmother had been a Jewish dancer, his grandfather a dealer of fish in Naples, his father a tanner of hides. The odium of this rumor clung to him.

“Hail to the singer of two worlds—the land and the sea! Son of the fishes! Gallant of the harpies! Amphibian Adonis! Hail! Hail!”

There were cries of “Almachus, poet of Neptune! Thy verses are as odorous as the stalls of the markets of Rhacotis! Hail!”

Almachus turned upon the crowd with a gaze of sneering disdain. Dropping the lotus lily to the floor with a careless gesture, he inquired:

“Where is the divine one? Why doth she not come to us? Knoweth she not that I am here? Silence! Harken! I have written a new poem. Even as I have put all the sunsets of the earth and their beauty into two lines, yea, as I have described all love in a couplet, so at last I have fittingly marshalled forth the queens of love of all time in this hymn!

“My poem celebrates the beauty of Mary! At last is she



immortalized in imperishable verse! No poem such as this was ever written in the world. No such poet as I have ever lived! I am wonderful, I am great! I have given a new meaning to poetry, a new interpretation to love! The world sees the sun through new eyes because of me! The gods themselves, through the revelation of my vision, have assumed a greater glory in the eyes of men!"

Mocking laughter answered him. One of the slave-girls jestfully attempted to embrace him. Almachus thrust her away with a curl of his lips.

"All women love me! I am so beautiful! My hair is as the light of the moon on the Nile! But I am weary of women whom I might love—I desire only that love that will refuse me! No woman save Mary hath ever resisted my charms!"

It was noted throughout Alexandria that, of all men, Mary contemptuously disdained Almachus. Almachus declared that Mary withheld him because she possessed for him a greater and more subtle passion than for any of her lovers. While his life was one of notorious debaucheries, Almachus announced that the consummate thrill, the ultimate acme of love was contained in the failure of its consummation.

Resisting the playful assaults of the Libyan beauties, Almachus minced about. Pausing before the door leading to the gardens, he extended his arms.

"Mary! Mary!" he called. "I whom the nightingales envy await thee. Goddess of the moon, Endymion hath come!"

Pelted by the dancing girls with pistachio nuts and orange-peels, he declaimed his poem to Mary:

"O marble Pallas, coldly beautiful  
And fair as no soft woman that I know,  
Unbend thou not to me. Extend not forth  
Thy snowy-chiselled arms. Let no warm kiss  
Inflame thy frozen lips. I know all love,  
The world hath yielded unto me all fruits.  
The swallow-winged songs of Sappho, yea,  
The strange dead flowers of which Catullus sang—  
These have been mine. Of love I weary, yea—  
I yearn but for the love that loves me not.  
Oh, love me not! With sharp scorn spurn me,  
With fierce rods flay me. Caress me with  
The crimson wounds of wrath, and turn from me!  
For thus, O Pallas, as none other, I possess thee  
And know a rapture sweet beyond . . ."

As he was about to finish elocuting with a sweeping gesture, Almachus's voice was drowned in a deafening salvo of cheers.

Nonchalantly fanning herself with plumes of ospreys, Mary, swathed in a mantle of silver tissue, appeared, followed by her great sable cat.

About her neck were ropes of amethysts, in her pyramidally piled hair a wreath of purple irises. Mary had left the gladiator and charioteer in the pavilion asleep.

Mary's appearance was the signal for uproarious acclamations. Libations were poured. The gamblers tipsily arose from their games and cheered. The philosophers ceased their discussions.

"Selene doth grace our feast!"

"Star of Egypt!"

"Hathor! Aphrodite!"

Without, from the far distance of the hot desert came the rumble of an approaching thunder-storm—a rare event in Alexandria. In the translucent star-set skies above the court appeared fugitive tremors of distant lightning.

"The thunders of Jupiter hail thee! Daughter of the ocean! Thou whose seat is the firmament! Thou whose breath giveth ardor to the earth! Hail! Hail!"

Mary gazed upon the assemblage with indifferent, tired eyes.

"How they weary me!" she muttered to the girl Doria. "Night after night—the desire and love of men!" She thought of the heroes of the circus she had left, and shuddered. "As swine that are fed they sleep!"

She listened to the thunder and thrilled.

"The gods are treading down the skies! Oh, insufferable void of life—oh, universe vast as the ache of my heart! Would that a god might bring some adequate and divine passion unto me! Would that my soul might be shaken by such love as Zeus brought unto Io, a love with the force and fire of lightnings and fierce as the fierce storms of the sea!"

Almachus, mincing forward with a sycophant simper, pressed through those standing near Mary and, bowing before her, fawned:

"I am here, O queen, with spice and myrrh from Araby!"

Mary's laughter rang out with impatient, half-amused scorn.

"Thou'rt here again, oh frog grotesque and garrulous! Away! thy ceaseless prattle jars on us! Thou are not sent me by the gods, thou freakish, silly incubus!"

"O, poppy of my poetry——"

Mary's panther, following, growled, and Almachus, paling, hopped away with bird-like step. At that moment one of the dancing girls, aiming a pulpy orange, hit the poet on the nose, and chattering in rage he ran across the court amid gibes and laughter. Extending a careless greeting here and there, smiling with unconcealed disinterest and boredom, Mary moved across the courtyard to where the philosophers sat. The panther crouched at her feet. An attendant offered her wine, but she shook her head; another brought her a casket of confections, which the panther eyed desirously. Ceasing to growl, it caressed Mary's feet ingratiatingly with its tongue; its mouth drooled.

"Tell me," said Mary, addressing the philosophers, "what think ye of love?"

"Thou seemest weary," said Helius, the eldest.

"Yea," replied Mary, "the service of Aphrodite bringeth languor and disquietude in its very fulfilment. This I ask of ye—what have your science and philosophy to say concerning love? What is it the soul eternally seeks through passion and findeth not? What is the disease wherewith the gods have inflicted mortals—what curse?"

"They who find thee cease to suffer and to yearn—thou art love's desire, love's fulfilment." Helius doted over his wine-cup upon her.

"Thou art a fool, then, for all thy philosophy," muttered Mary, impatiently flinging a sweetmeat to her pet. "Be serious with me—I would thou answer me. What doth thy philosophy propound concerning the desire of love?"

Helius drained his cup. He replied gravely:

"In the beginning the dwellers of the earth were perfect in themselves, possessing in a balancing degree the qualities of the male and the female. They had four arms and four legs; they moved as a wheel turns, with a circular motion, and

with incredible speed. They reproduced through themselves and possessed the strength of giants. Even the gods became afraid and, fearing their own power might be endangered, they smote the early denizens of the earth, dividing each into two. As they were cloven asunder, some were divided as to be absolutely male, leaving their counterparts absolutely female, and as such are the majority of men and women. Others were cloven unequally with the qualities of both the male and female to varying degrees in themselves, and as such are the higher types of men and women of the earth—poets, sculptors, masters of the cythera and lyre; for the souls of these—partaking of the dual sexes—are made pregnant with visions, divine truths, superhuman philosophers. Whereas the souls of those who are perfectly male and female are always reincarnated in bodies of their kind, those of the dual nature are born under both male and female appearing forms. They are the favored children of the gods, but are not understood and consequently regarded with antagonism and often derision by coarser men.

“The stress of the ages is for readjustment. Every severed being seeketh its divided counterpart. Those perfectly male seek the female counterpart of themselves; those unequally divided seek that being which to a mathematical degree of perfection shall complement itself. The desire for such consummation is known as love.”

“I have known many men,” said Mary, shaking her head wearily. “It seemeth my heart hath hungered with the love-ache of all women in the world. Men’s kisses have left me as one who, parched with thirst, drinketh a cup empty of water or of wine.”

Helius continued:

“The union whereof I speak is of the soul. Physical passion is but a base perversion of a primal spiritual yearning. Seizing upon that divine yearning of the soul for perfect love, nature has effected the lower union of men and women for her purposes of reproduction. But such is unworthy of those who know the truth. The Eternal Mind, being without passion, is complete in itself. Only by conquering and annihilating the desires that ache through the flesh shall the soul finally meet

its godly complement, enjoy a spiritual union and unfleshy perfection."

Mary looked up, rather satirically smiling.

"Thou believest this?"

Helius drew himself up with dignity.

"And thou comest here?" Mary concluded.

The philosopher melted.

"Philosophy is abstract, the compromises of life necessary for content. Finding the celestial Venus unresponsive in her Uranian heaven, we seek the earthly. Thus, by quelling the irritations of the flesh and lulling the outer senses, our minds remain free to indulge in divine philosophy."

He attempted to embrace Mary. But quietly she repelled his arm, murmuring:

"Of all things philosophy giveth little of wisdom and less of courtesy."

Mary turned to another, Faustus by name.

"What sayest *thou* of love?" she asked. "Why do my veins vex me as with the ferments of young wine? Men embrace me. I am ever apart. I hunger for a substance beyond the flesh! Tell me, what hast thou to say?"

Faustus, extending his wine-cup for refilling, replied:

"Conscious existence is the outcome of the unrealized yearning of all things. One is commensurately appreciable of enjoyment as he is latently susceptible to pain. He is most capable of goodness who hath the capacity within himself for the greatest evil. The philosopher, therefore, having wisdom, as our friend Helius, is prone to the most egregious folly." He smiled, nodding his head wisely. "One desires love not because love is possible, but because it is unobtainable. The consummation of love would mean the cessation of the desire of love. All fulfilment is annihilation."

Faustus sipped his wine and went on: "When the divine spirit, discontented with the calm of ages, projected itself upon the darkness, it set the darkness into motion. In the act of creation the Divine-All objectively mirrored what had subjectively existed within itself. Out of the motion of the darkness came chaos, and, out of the movement of the chaos, heat and light. Thence solar systems, suns, stars, life upon

planets, man. There came into being the seven principles of existence, the sevenfold scale of colors, sounds, substances. The Eternal Essence by projecting itself revealed itself to itself, and became conscious of its creations by reason of the very conflict of the forces created. At first a spark projected from the Immortal Fountain, the soul, rising through all the scales of existence, attains self-consciousness in the form of man. As such it is only the more restlessly eager to return to the immortal source whence it came, the unconscious Absolute. But it cannot by reason of the dissonance that exists between itself and the Divine Father. Suffering from a consciousness of passion, of desire, of mundane situations, of its quantity and quality, it is unable to assimilate into the Divine—which is the object of all its desires, but which is in reality no object, because the Ultimate has neither thought nor feeling, is capable neither of love nor hate, has neither length nor breadth, and which, being all, exists not.

“How shall the soul attain the all-desired goal? How shall it attune itself to the Ultimate, and again, being in unison, merge into the Unheard Harmony of Things? Realizing its imperfection, the soul seeks to find attunement through human love. As Helius hath said, though not with sufficient clarity, the individual soul is imperfect, being divisional in sex. For when the Divine Spirit envisioned itself upon the dark, the mother-father elements projected forth were cloven, and in the severing of the original principles all nature partook. The created universe exists, and is conscious of its existence, only by reason of the division of the two elements. Each seeks the other. Thus it is Darkness pursues the Light. Harken to the thunder! Thus it is the two forces of Nature flash their fiery-tongued kisses across the sky in the leash of storms. Thus it is that spring follows winter; that flowers bloom, that trees fruit, that animals propagate. The invisible forces of life, as rivers, flow through the universe, seeking their outlet and completion through all the million forms of visible existence. She-leopards whine, lions roar, birds sing, not merely for joy or pain, but of the anguished desire to mate. Flowers bloom, not that the earth may be beautiful, but that, being colorful and honeyed, they may attract the bees whose duty

it is to carry the male element to the female of flowers. All nature seethes in a maelstrom of sex antagonism and sex desire. Minerals have sex and move strangely. The winds combine the elements of the female and the male, and as they mate or clash bring fertilizations upon the earth, hordes of insects, droughts, and diseases. Thus, one season the harvests ripen in plenteousness, in another a plague decimates the earth. All Nature seeks to restore itself into perfect unison. Were, however, all things suddenly to resolve themselves into harmony, were every cell in the myriad universes suddenly to coalesce perfectly, were the unseen quickening forces of agitated creation suddenly to flux—then the universe, stars, suns, planets, all forms of life, in a divine transcendent clash of harmony, would tremble into silence, and being attuned to Him, the Absolute All, would merge silently, unknowingly, unconsciously into the Divine. All things would be resolved into that whence they came, the darkness, the void, the desired Elysium—the Nothing.

“Now thou, Mary, desirest love because, among those whom thou hast loved, thou hast met none whose spiritual qualities answer the needs of thy spirit, or whose needs would be met by elements within thyself. Wert thou to meet one with whose spirit thine would blend, then thou and that one would merge into one being, and, one with the original divine nature, thou wouldst be absorbed into the Nameless One who knoweth naught, who is not conscious of joy because He is not conscious of pain, who feeleth neither love nor hate because love and hate, as well as both elements of sex, exist, perfectly balanced, within Himself.”

Mary sighed audibly.

“Thy philosophy, Faustus, is abstruse, and yet it satisfies me not. Methinks if perfect love, as thou sayest, means absorption into blankness and nothingness, it would defeat the very purpose of its desire. If we come from darkness, why not, through love, attain a godly consciousness in regions of light? If, undreaming and undesiring, we come from the womb of joylessness, why not, through love, attain an Eternity of Ecstasy? The love of earth is ephemeral—aye, as the Christians say! But may there not be some love everlasting? Faustus, Helius, my friends! Instead of extinction into the

bosom of a dead Creator, an unknowing force. why should there not be an Elysium where, in the arms of one All-Desired—a God perchance!—one might immortally and never-endingly thrill in a luxury of passion, an acme of delicious delight in which there would be no abatement, no subsidence of the heart, no chill waning of the ardor, no ebbing of the pulse-throb, no sudden dissatisfied despair and sense of defeat! Imagine the transport of such a union—the kiss wherewith mouths shall never part, the breath never fail, the heart relax, but which, thrilling, tingling, and immense, shall last for ever and ever!”

Mary's breath came in low gasps, her eyes glowed. Her nostrils distended as she heard the far-away thunder. With each tremor of the lightnings in the sky she felt tinglings to her finger-tips. The fury of the elements always stirred her; in the stress of storms her being seemed to merge wildly into the vital forces of the world and thrill with the tumult of things.

“A storm cometh,” she breathed. “Would that an Olympian might come for me! But the gods,” she added, “never, never come.” Turning to the mathematician, Mary asked:

“Thou art versed in the movements of the heavenly bodies and knowest the lore of the stars. How dost thou explain that no man hath ever loved me perfectly? Why am I beset with a hunger no kisses satiate? Is there aught of perfect joy and peace reserved for me beyond the veils of fate? Tell me what thou hast to say—how explainest thou this thing?”

The mathematician replied:

“All existing things are allied and in their movement bear upon one another. When thou wert born the position of stars determined thy fate. Thou art moved by unalterable laws; thou seekest love because so, in thy natal hour, the stars described the orbit of thy life.”

Mary shook her head.

“I do not see the logic of thy argument,” she said.

In a slow, precise voice the mathematician explained:

“All matter is united in an invisible, etheric ocean which fills all space. Thou art imprisoned in a universe without outlet. All things change constantly, all things move; nothing is at rest. The combined movement of atoms determines results



which shall eventuate æons afterward. Thou art the result of all that went before thee; part of a changing cosmos in the perpetual evolution of which thou art involuntarily moved in thy life as are the seasons, the weather, plants, winds, clouds. The stars are the keys of the riddle, the alphabet of the enigma;—yet the stars and the planet that ruled thy birth were themselves projected in their courses by forces generated æons ago by the gods. They are themselves directed by influences greater than is theirs upon thy life. In the divine comedy of destiny, thy life, thy thoughts, the events of thy existence are inexorably determined. Over the door of his study Plato wrote that none should enter unless he understood mathematics; Pythagoras, likewise, understood that by mathematics the movement of the stars can be predicted, and by this the future destiny of men.”

He smiled with grave superiority.

“Well—and the conclusion of this?” Mary flung a confection to her pet. “Am I as the beast that feedeth thus—to wait until the fates fling sweets unto me; to cringe and wait for what the stars determine? Am I to be supine, without ambition, energy, to seek no perfect bliss beyond the present, to have no hope beyond?”

“The conclusion,” answered the mathematician tersely, “is to abide by the will of the gods. Be content with what the day brings; by night reach forth thy hands not toward any dawn. Expect naught, desire naught save what is given. Thy fate is already sealed; thy destiny is guided by a star.”

Mary rose from the couch, breathing deeply.

“Fools, fools!” she exclaimed. “What then of ambition? What then of aspiration? What then of ideals to be struggled for? Of humanity’s transfiguring hopes? Of all golden dreams? How dead, how dull thou wouldst make existence! How futile all living! Gods in the thundering heavens, what shameful indignity, what unworthy cowardice to submit inertly to some hopeless fate! Nay!” She turned from the learned man, shaking her head with pitying hauteur—“Nay, my friend! Perchance, as thou sayest, a star somewhat influenceth my fate—but, even so, verily I say unto thee, the destiny of many stars is swayed by me!”

## XI

THE hilarity of the revellers, the ribald jests of the gamers, the cocksure pedanticism of the philosophers, the singing and the dancing exasperated Mary. She wanted air—the free vision of the skies. As she crossed the court one of the inebriated guests tried to detain her, but she shook him angrily from her. The panther following, she ascended to the terrace on the roof.

On the distant sea a white sail gleamed in the light of the Pharos tower. Over the flat and conical roof-tops Mary could see the rolling expanses of the sandy wastes, the horizon troubled with swirling vapors. Long tongues of lightning liquidly quivered down the sky. The cypress and plane trees of the garden were shaken by gusts of wind. Mary inbreathed the cool breeze with refreshed delight. She felt the exultance of the storm in her veins. A wild, importunate longing for the freedom of the winds, the clouds, the desert, the skies above swelled in her bosom. In a space between riven clouds overhead a constellation, silvery white and greenly golden, burned.

Her destiny determined by a star! Mary smiled. Swayed by a star indeed! Unformulated, she was conscious of a sense of power and individual destiny within herself—a power that drew from the reservoirs of centuries, a destiny that verily had its reins hitched to the swinging worlds.

“Wise men, but ever fools; steeped in the learning of books, but ignorant of life; acquainted with philosophy, but destitute of experience. Pedants whose own lives confute their reasoning. Bah!”

Leaning on the parapet, Mary's gaze traversed the city—the city of her fame, the city that was enthralled by her beauty more than that of any woman who had ever lived. She was queen of love. But what was the worth of it all? Her heart seemed to sink into deep, black waters. She became lost in reverie.

“Queen-star of the Pleiades, doth aught trouble thee to-night?” The Chaldean soothsayer touched Mary on the arm. Startled, she turned.

"Life wearies me," said she.

"Thou hast great possessions; thou art beautiful; men adore thee. What more can woman ask?"

The dark, saturnine face leered inscrutably.

"I am weary of men's adoration," she answered, almost rebelliously. "The Christians pronounce one truth—the love of men is vain. I have possessions, yea, mortgaged to the Jews. I have beauty which shall wither as the lotus beneath the torrid sun. I am tired. The world saith I am much beloved. Men love that of me which parades before them, painted, gaudily arrayed in silks of gold and vermilion. But me—me they do not know—me, men do not love."

"What seekest thou?"

"Hear the thunder . . ." Mary placed her hand on the Chaldean's arm. "I have said to myself this night I desired a god for a lover. I would my heart were smitten by some divine lightning. I would my spirit were driven by some empyrean passion as clouds by winds, the desert sands by simoons. I spoke this night with yon philosophers and they recited their droll sophistries. Tell me, hast thou aught beyond thy cant and trickery? Canst thou tell me of the future, of my heart's unrest and its fulfilment, of what awaits me in life or death?"

A bolt of livid lightning shot across the sky. In the quick glare Mary saw the Chaldean's deep-sunken eyes fastened upon her. They were like black wells. She knew the man was credited with marvellous powers of divination and magic, and, while he notoriously played upon the credulity of many women, Mary recalled authenticated cases of prophecy.

The Chaldean spoke slowly:

"That which is hath already been. That which shall be is now. Thou art the potter who makest the vessel of thy fate; and yet thou art moulded by that greater than thou. Thou art free in thy choice, and yet thou art not free. The future lieth before thy feet; there are many roads; yet the road thou shalt take was predestined from the beginning."

Thunder reverberated through the sky.

"Thy words are contradictory," said Mary.

"The truth is ever so," replied the Chaldean. "Behold,

truth is called the light. Yet in the light are all colors. Is red false and blue true? All colors that conflict merge into that which is without color. This is truth. Wouldst thou have me conjure thy fate?"

"By the gods, yes!" Mary exclaimed, "if thou hast aught to tell me. Never have I consulted thee, for I long since lost faith in thy arts—thy fellows are mostly cheap tricksters."

The Chaldean ignored her remark.

"Come, then," said he.

They descended. Within the court, near the entrance, a bronze tripod smouldered with incense. The Chaldean drew from the folds of his girdle a tiny casket, which he held before Mary.

"In this," he explained, "is contained a magical essence which, unfolding in vapor, affords a sensitive substance for the materialized projection of those archetypal conditions of the past and the future as they brood in the divine mind—the omniscient, unchanging reality behind the visible."

Mary regarded it with interested but incredulous gaze.

"Of what doth it consist?" she asked.

"Of properties most potent." The magician's eyes burningly dilated. "Of those whereof I may tell thee—and this will demonstrate the painstaking efforts of those who seek to master matter that thereby they may become acquainted with the spiritual—there are the essence of mandragora, that plant which partakes of the human and screameth with anguish when torn from the ground; the juices of poppies plucked at the hour of noon, of seven colors; and of nightshade and henbane gathered at the mid-hour of night; the extract of hemlock, of aloes, and the pith of a plant which groweth in the depth of the forest beyond the falls of the Nile; the flower thereof is of a wondrous color, exhales a poison nauseous and deadly, and, as the beasts of prey, captures animals and birds upon which it feedeth and the bones whereof are found in its pit. There are compounded herein also the seeds of plants, the distillation of potent flowers, the poison of serpents, the magical plumage of the bird of night,\* the viscera of ani-

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\* The *Nocturna Strigis* of Horace.

mals sacred to the gods distilled to a broth, and the hearts of seven bats slain at night in the full of the moon. There are other potions and vital ingredients, secret and sacred, as may not be spoken of to the profane."

"A truly marvellous concoction," said Mary. She turned and clapped her hands.

"Silence!" she called. "I can scarcely hear. Away! Give us space!" The throng near the doorway drew back apace, gazing at the Chaldean with mild curiosity.

"Bend forward—breathe upon the coals," said the Chaldean, making passes over the brazier with his hands. "Project thy spirit into the infinite. Give thyself unto the powers on whose knees rests thy fate."

The magician emptied the contents of the casket upon the charcoal, uttering his formula in a low voice. Onto the smouldering charcoal he cast a tiny wax figure, whereupon he made signs in the air, and, moving about the tripod, described mystic figures. Bluish vapors arose, enfolding Mary. The magician paused.

"Ask, and it shall be revealed unto thee."

"Shall this existence which wearies and oppresses me change? Shall I know peace of heart? Shall I know such love as the gods brought to mortal women? Tell me—what lieth beyond in the future?"

Those who had paused in their merrymaking and dancing drew closer to hear.

"Methinks I see a woman wandering by night in the city's streets. Mary of Alexandria, hear! Great as is thy glory, tenfold greater shall be thy shame! The riches of thy life shall be stripped from thee; those who lived deliciously with thee shall mourn from afar; those who sought thee with treasures of silk and gold shall turn away from thee and thou shalt hear only the words of their mockery. As the light of the candle that expireth in the wind thy glory shall depart. The voice I hear is the voice of one wailing in the darkness, and the darkness is terrible about thee."

Gasping, Mary drew back. Her face paled beneath its crimson stains.

"Tell me—tell me," she breathed in terror. "I know thou

liest! Thou pratest as that dog Philamon! But continue! What dost thou see? Shall I know peace of heart? Speak!"

For a long while the Chaldean was silent.

"The long years are as a road that windeth through the darkness. Thou shalt journey alone. The sorrow within thy heart is as the sound of a thousand women wailing over the death of their first-born. Out of the darkness cometh light. Methinks I see a woman kneeling before a dawn more golden than the sunrise! Mary of Alexandria, hear! One cometh unto thee who shall bring thee such love as men have not to give, who shall give thy heart peace."

"Oh! Speak! Speak!" panted Mary, clasping her hands.

"He is clothed with the blue of the firmament; the sun is a crown upon his head."

"Whence—whence cometh he?" asked Mary, breathless.

"From beyond the skies."

"And who is he that cometh?"

"One greater than the Olympians," answered the Chaldean.

"Thou art mad—the gods are dead! Thou mockest me. Tell me his name!"

The Chaldean groaned; he swayed to and fro as if struggling.

"His name I do not know. . . . To find him thou must suffer tribulation and drink of the cup of tears. When men reject thee utterly he shall open his arms to thee. When men afflict thee, and persecute thee, and give thee utmost grief, he shall bring thee peace."

"His name—his name," urged Mary.

The Chaldean shuddered and drew back, in his eyes a glassy stare.

"His name existeth in symbols. I know him not. He rideth upon the lightnings; the springs of the earth tremble beneath his feet. Methinks I hear the thunder of lyres and of harpers and of many flute-players playing. The voice that cometh unto me commands I say this unto thee. In his sign thou shalt learn his name. Behold!"

The Chaldean raised his arm. From the spiral pillar of vapor rising perpendicularly from the brazier slowly extended two wavering arms of smoke.

"The symbol of the Christians," muttered one of those who looked on with amazement. "The Cross of the carpenter-God." There was a ribald peal of laughter.

"Ah!" Mary turned upon the soothsayer, enraged. "Trickster, how darest thou gibe me with thy frauds! Away! I was serious with thee. I should have known thou wouldst mock me with thy chicaneries! Begone from me!"

The Chaldean bowed gravely.

"I have served thee as best I know with my humble art."

Laughing scornfully, Mary abruptly turned and, calling her pet, moved amid the guests. Caught in a troop of dancers who came whirling along, the Chaldean was carried across the court in their midst. The storm broke over the city. Drops of rain fell. Slaves hurriedly stretched the awnings. The noise of the revellers almost drowned the rumble of the thunder.

Olympiodorus, who had just recently returned to Alexandria after his flight following the massacre, fearing the wrath of the Christians, entered. "Greetings," said Mary. "My friend, rain in Alexandria is as love—rare in life. By the way, I hear that Helladius and Ammonius, who fled with thee, are in Constantinople."

"Yes," said Olympiodorus, "teaching grammar. All danger seems over. Indeed, they write me they are employed by tutors in Christian families. By Silenus, look yonder!"

Amid the crowd, Almachus strutted to and fro, reciting poetry to guests who reclined on divans in the arms of glee-girls. His nose was oily with perspiration, his eyes leered. His slave-boy held a goblet of wine, which he quaffed when his voice became husky. His verses were unheard.

"By Cerberus, he resembleth a pickled lamprey," said Mary. "Doth he never weary of himself? Come, let us sit."

The philosophers were discussing the progress of the Christian cult. Mary and Olympiodorus seated themselves on a divan nearby to listen. The panther crouched at Mary's feet.

"Deplore the prospect as you will," said Glaucō, "I predict the cult of the Christians will spread over the entire earth."

This statement evoked contemptuous jeers.

"By what argument," asked Helius, "dost thou support so absurd a contention? For consider this—the dogs execrate all that is beautiful; they would destroy our books of learning, our paintings, statues, works of gold, silver, and glass. Clean living and wholesome pleasures are regarded as sinful. They exalt all that is ugly and revel in filth. Sayest thou such a religion will prevail beyond a century, that it is more than a hysterical contagion which has affected the illiterate?"

"Verily," declared Glauco. "For the very reasons thou hast stated, Christianity will be a great success. The love of beauty and pursuit of art will pass; men will cease to give themselves to philosophy; learning will be dead. Indeed, I do not consider it improbable that at some future age men will cease to know their planet is round, but consider it flat, and that, setting their carpenter up as a god, they will forget the names of the Olympians. They will even cease to speak according to the rules of grammar and rhetoric!"

"I cannot admit such a thing," said Helius. "Surely the splendid books of Plato will remain to quicken the intelligence of men. Forsooth, thinkest thou a religion that eschews the bath will appeal to cleanly men? What do we behold? Monks that flog themselves, eat rotten food, cultivate ulcers on their persons as assiduously as a gardener cultivates lentils! Thou hast heard of Anthony whom they revere as a saint? A madman whose beard was a nest of lice—or was it birds? Thinkest thou the time will ever come when intelligent men will emulate the example of such a one rather than follow the courses left by Plato, Socrates, Xenophon?"

"Anthony's name will be known and Plato's forgotten," tersely declared Glauco, sipping his wine. "I will tell thee why."

A young Roman aristocrat, Aulus by name, interrupted:

"The follies of these zealots are incredible, but not without humor. Aught that is ridiculous can never be taken seriously by intelligent men. Christianity cannot persist because of its absurdities. As our learned Helius has remarked, men of reason will never follow the example of Anthony in his madness rather than that of Plato in pursuing wisdom."



"'Tis a vile religion," said Mary, shuddering.

Glauco went on:

"This religion will probably spread over the earth and prevail for ages. For hearken! The shrewd doctors of the cult have cunningly seized upon man's primal and most powerful instinct, which they declare to be evil. Knowing that men will ever follow their nature, they enjoin their believers, in order that they may mate, to secure ceremonial authorization. Or, if they act contrary to their teachings, they are under the obligation of seeking pardon. Utilizing a natural desire, and forbidding its realization as sin, they bring all within the power of the hierarchs. You must remember these desert celibates are only a small portion of this remarkable cult. More, stigmatizing all pleasure as sinful, they therefore make what they forbid more desirable and accomplish two ends—add to pleasure a forbidden thrill and bring to their knees for forgiveness those who indulge. Of course, they do not expect man to forego what he has enjoyed for ages, nor do they desire him to do so. You must consider also that the lower classes have no inherent love of beauty. The god Apollo, whose face is as the sun, appealeth not to them. They prefer hideous deities. Denying salvation to the man of wealth, making it as impossible for him to enter their heaven as the passage of a camel through a needle's eye, they glorify poverty as a virtue, make meanness of life and abstinence from food a qualification for celestial ecstasy. Thus they appeal to slaves and the rabble who hate the rich as a class, and who are thus reconciled to their abjectness and given the comforting promise of a heaven in which they, and not men of position and culture, shall constitute the aristocracy. A clever theology!"

"That such a religion shall spread over the earth is incredible," persisted Helius.

"It may embrace the rabble," said Aulus, "but never men of intelligence."

"The rabble, as I have said," declared Glauco, "ever prevail in numbers, and men of power are often not of the intelligent. Otherwise Alexandria would not suffer from her tribulations to-day. Consider what we witness. Temples of the gods destroyed. By whom? By the order of the Emperor!"

The sanctuary of Serapis annihilated, the Serapium library burned. In violation of the law? No, with the approval of Theodosius. Mark me, the Christian religion hath a hell such as was not dreamed of in our mythical Tartarus. It plays upon the ineradicable human quality of fear. The ignorant are ever fearful, and emperors and kings are too often weak-minded. Witness the Emperor withering under the threats of Ambrose, abjectly making public penance, and imagining he sees visions!"

"He is too often drunk," said Aulus contemptuously.

"'Tis said that Maximilla and Crobyle, the courtesans, have been converted. Is this true?" asked Mary.

"Aye," replied Aulus. "A most amazing spectacle. A band of monks marched to their house and preached. At first both laughed and pelted oranges at the holy men. Finally they fell to weeping, descended to the streets, and went forth into the desert. Their houses and all their wealth they gave to the Patriarch. But they are only two of many such converts. Of late a score of the most notorious street prostitutes disappeared. For days naught was heard of them. Finally word came that they are clothed in white robes and wander, singing, in the gardens of the nunneries along the Nile. This same monk who led the band that took Crobyle and the aging Maximilla to the desert not a moon ago visited the inns along the wharves and induced nigh to a score of women—low creatures who lived by thievery—to go with him. Imagine those hags in the robes of the white sisterhood!"

"An extraordinary religion," said Helius, "and truly one that appealeth to the low."

"And this monk who took these women with him," asked Mary, "I wonder if it is one of whom I have heard. Recallest thou his name?"

The gallant shook his head.

"Niobides?" asked Mary, prompting him. "Was his name Niobides?"

"The same," exclaimed the Roman. "A handsome maniac, by the gods! I wonder not that the diseased, moth-eaten harpies follow him! It seemeth he maketh it his special work to exhort women of pleasure to his life, for of late he hath

borne down upon the homes of some of our most famous beauties and, sometimes gaining admittance, hath urged them to go with him. 'Tis singular, for he maketh love to none, and indeed hath resisted those who would, on their part, convert him to the worship of Polyhymnia, an unchaste goddess!" He laughed heartily.

"I would meet this monk," said Mary. "I have sought him often, but he hath ever eluded my vigilance. Methinks he hath met no antagonist worthy of his metal. If thou see him, bring him to my house. By the gods, I would defend the honor of Venus. 'Twould be a novel victory, indeed, to vanquish the scruples of one so famed as an enemy of the Cyprian."

"Aye, a worthy endeavor and, if successful, a merry jest upon the pious sheep-skin. By Pollux, I swear the next time I see him I will bring him hither."

Cato, a magistrate, joining the party, spoke:

"Not long ago I met this extraordinary person at the house of Philamon, who, as you know, hath become a leader of the sect. In order to acquaint his friends with the doctrines of the cult, Philamon invited to banquet a number of magistrates, teachers, philosophers, and members of the municipal government. Methinks the excellent Philamon believed we should all be converted! Acute as were his wits in business, Philamon hath now quite lost his reason. On his right at the table sat this monk Niobides. 'Twas not without interest, that repast, I assure you. But, by Bacchus, it was a sorry one—not a drop of wine to quench our thirst, and the food was unseasoned!"

The fat man laughed, took a gulp of wine and, smacking his jowls, pursued:

"Besides this monk there were present two deacons and a doctor of the Church. In the course of the conversation one of them asked how we explained the worship of dumb idols of wood or brass. I think it was Palemon, great, as you know, in wisdom and clear of logic, who undertook to enlighten these fanatics concerning the worship of the true gods. He explained that they were representations of the powers of Nature, such as the fructifying spirit of the earth. Thereupon arose this

madman, Niobides. He denounced the gods as powers of darkness—which to me lacked logic, for if the gods are but idols of stone, how can they be such fearsome demons? He denounced us, his fellow-guests at banquet, the dogs being ungentle and unacquainted with courtesy. Then, by Momus, he denounced nature, all natural instincts, declaring that the world should presently be burnt to a cinder. ‘Wherefore,’ I asked him, ‘dost thou impugn the divine life that animates trees, flowers, fields of corn? Is not the world of Nature exalting, its beauty conducive to high thoughts?’ He turned upon me a visage of frightsome aspect and thundered thus:

“‘Nature is the mask of the devil! What thou callest beauty is temptation in disguise! The nature of man is evil, his desires low. That which cometh from the earth is base and of the earth earthy. Woe to him who revelleth in the beauty of visible things! Flee from Nature! Nature is but the instrument of the devil. Her most enchanting aspects hide the grinning faces of demons?’” The magistrate laughed as he finished mimicking the monk.

“Thereupon, comrades,” Cato continued, “what think you this holy man further declared? Well, as we were possessed by curiosity, we encouraged him in his tirade. He asserted that the mating of animals and the fertilization of flowers is sinful; that animals and flowers consequently are vile and unchaste! Trees, animals, vegetables conceived in lust! Germination, whether in fields of wheat or among herds of cattle, a thing repulsive and unclean! The world of Nature, asserted this curious fellow, is engaged in a horrible bacchanalia. I swear I tried to keep a straight face, for the monk was in fiery earnest. He told of a member of his community who, in order to escape the temptations presented in his bean and melon garden, put out his eyes. Imagine, good friends, the promiscuity of willow trees, the polygamous passions of vegetables, the dreadful incests of mimosas and oleanders! Conceive the sinks of iniquity, the haunts of vice, the irresistible seductions and suggestions of pleasure that exist in your vegetable gardens! My friends, put yourselves in accord with our unwashed friends who so fearfully flee to the desert! Beware of the perils with which you are surrounded! Look yonder and

consider—that dangerous, fearful, and insidious thing—the lechery that lurks in the organism of that hibiscus tree!”

His audience became convulsed.

“I was curious myself about these monks,” said Valerius, boon companion of Aulus. “So I went up the Nile and looked over one of the communities there. By Mercury, ’tis marvellous, the originality and assiduity of their tortures. Their wounds, ulcers, and most repulsive disfigurements they call roses of heaven! Methinks their god should hold his nose! One of the number, I was told, had buried himself in the sand up to the neck and there remained for a half-score days, when an antelope, hungered to a degree that it was no longer discriminating concerning its food, came along and, mistaking the protruding head of the saint for a head of cabbage, began to graze. The holy man’s yells brought his brethren and his penitence abruptly ceased. Another of this community—I remember the incident perfectly, as I made note of it in my journal—Paul by name, carried on his back a huge bag of stones, which day by day was stone by stone increased. Thus, so the stoneite believed, would the sins on his soul be lifted. Well, one day, the bag was removed with great solemnity, and Paul found himself bent double. No longer able to look at the sky, this pleased him very much. He was quite distinguished. Indeed, envied! His holiness was so visible! The temptation of gluttony, however, pursued the right-angularite, and this was further augmented by his proximity to the melon gardens cultivated by another brother. Melons began mysteriously to disappear. At first it was believed the devils had developed a taste for melons. One night, while vigilantly watching for demons or satyrs, or perchance sylphs, the monkly gardener saw what he thought was one moving in his garden. Going forward, he found the right-angularite nibbling at his garden treasures. The next day—it was the day I was there—this Paul was brought before the abbot. Ha—ha! I shall never forget the humpback jogging about wailing and weeping and beating his breast. ‘I have sinned! I have sinned!’ he whimpered. ‘Woe unto me that I should have borne my burden of stones in vain and am now bowed down with confusion! I was tempted. I did it. I am undone by my belly!

I have carried my stones in vain!’ A motley crew, by Jupiter!”

The company roared with amusement.

“What folly!” muttered Helius. “What ignorance!”

“Madness!” exclaimed Aulus. “The gods have smitten these dogs, surely! Divine they may claim to be—but only in their malady.”

While the discussion concerning Christianity had gone on, many of the guests had vanished with dancing girls. On the opposite side of the court a dozen roisterers had bedecked Almachus in the attire of one of the women dancers and, giped with mock flattery, the poet clumsily pirouetted about, soddenly declaiming a song. The gamblers had begun to quarrel; Cyprian, seeing Mary seated near the philosophers, unsteadily rose. He reeled into a group of dancers, who roughly repulsed him, and was almost precipitated into the pool. Clinging to one of the pillars, he leered, with a sort of fixed madness, upon Mary. The girls teased him, but he paid no attention whatever to them. Cyprian was an ungainly youth, with a sallow face, small idiotic eyes, and inordinately large ears.

“Hell’s Cerberus take the Christians!” shouted Olympiodorus. “Let us be entertained!” He flung a handful of coins into the air, whereupon the dancing girls and Greek chorus boys went scrambling over the floor. Turning to Mary—“Hast thou no novelty to offer us to-night? I have suffered exile and need to be entertained. I am bored with talk of the Christians; philosophy is profitless. My throat thirsts. Bring me wine!”

“I have always a pleasure in reserve for my guests,” said Mary, clapping her hands and addressing a slave—“Bring hither Nourjean!”

“And who is Nourjean?” asked Olympiodorus.

“A Persian boy whom I bought but yesterday—a child as delightful as his name, which meaneth ‘Light of the World.’ He spendeth his time eating sweetmeats and playing with dolls. He hath a voice sweeter than any of the girls, and composeth songs of the dawn—both in Persian and Greek. Perchance his songs will please thee!”

Accompanied by two blacks, who parted the curtains, Nourjean presently appeared at one of the doorways. The lad was slender, with skin white as milk and features as tenderly delicate as those of a girl. In his hair—long, silken, raven black—was a wreath of anemones, blood-red, yet not redder than the boy's lips. His eyes were meltingly limpid, soft as velvet, of a deep chestnut, and rolled over the assemblage with a child's coy *naïveté* mingled with a woman's flashing coquetry. At the doorway he paused, blushing, then, seeing Mary beckoning, dashed impetuously forward.

"Truly an exquisite creature," said Olympiodorus.

"Thus must have been Ganymede when he was carried off by the divine eagle," exclaimed Aulus, the Roman. "A cup-bearer worthy of the gods! And of a goddess!"

In the glow of the light behind Mary's couch the guests saw that the boy's cheeks were painted and his lips stained. With an unconsciously exquisite abandon he flung himself at Mary's feet.

"Sing to us, Light of the World," said Mary, petting his soft head tenderly. The youth colored.

"To-morrow thou shalt have sweetmeats," she promised, "and perchance a doll."

Nourjean hid his face in a fold of Mary's dress. Under duress of her coaxing he rose bashfully.

"Silence! Silence!" Mary called, clapping her hands. The clamor in the court subsided and the boy began to sing. He sang a Persian love song of his own composing. His voice was a pure soprano, of extraordinary quality. The visitors listened entranced.

While Nourjean was singing, Cyprian released his hold upon the pillar and, reeling forward, sank beside Mary's right on the divan. Recalling his father's visit, Mary smiled, and Cyprian, encouraged, placed his arm about her. For the first time he did not find himself repulsed. Mary breathed some mock endearment, and the youth's arm closed tighter.

"This afternoon this simpleton's father called upon me," Mary murmured to Olympiodorus. "He urged me to close my doors upon this unlovely fool and offered me gold. The gods wot, I need money—but his I could not accept. He is

a dog and a Christian. Olympiodorus, never could I tolerate this leering ape—verily, much as I hate Philamon, I would I never saw his face again! Methinks Philamon is welcome to his son. In matters of love the first law is one of taste. Yea, I shall surrender this befuddled idiot as a fitting candidate to his father's faith!" She laughed softly and tried to extricate herself from Cyprian's embrace.

Her resistance inflamed the youth; his eyes flashed dangerously; he uttered a drunken oath.

Startled, Mary turned and looked upon him with indignation and contemptuous hauteur.

"Thou little jackal!"

He tried to draw her to him.

Enraged, Mary struck him across the face.

"Release me, thou beast! Thou art mad! Thou art drunk!"

A volley of thunder exploded in the sky overhead. Veering about over the city, the storm again broke. A terrific gust of wind lifted the awning over the court and rent it in a dozen places. Half the lights were extinguished. With a frightened shriek, Nourjean flung himself at Mary's feet. In the excitement Mary saw Cyprian lean over—felt his mouth nigh to her own.

Revulsion and fury filled her. Seizing Cyprian's wrists, she tried to disengage his hands. They tussled, rolling to and fro. Mary saw Cyprian's inflamed eyes gloating upon her, in them maniac determination—madness.

"Son of a dog! I say—away from me! Madman!"

Lightning flashed through the rent awning. Thunder descended with a crushing weight upon the earth. Slaves rushed hither and thither, tugging at the awning ropes. Mary felt Cyprian forcing her beneath his weight with the strength of one insane with uncontrollable passion.

"Horus! Horus!" Mary screamed, incensed, desperate.

In an instant the panther, which had lain on the floor growling, responded. Leaping upon Cyprian, its deadly jaws closed upon the nape of his neck. Mary heard the regurgitating growl of the feline as its teeth crunched into Cyprian's spine. His grip on Mary limply relaxed. He rolled upon the



floor, struggling in the embrace of the blood-maddened beast. Its sable body heaved with a voluptuous motion.

Whimpering with affright, Nourjean rushed from the court. The slaves and dancers followed.

“Horus! Horus! Away!”

Seizing its furry neck with both hands, Mary, who had not expected the animal to make a fatal attack, tried to drag it from Cyprian. The youth’s frenzied yells tortured the air. Snarling, the animal’s claws tenaciously clung, its jaws closing, blood spurting over its jowls.

One of the philosophers seized an urn and hurled it at the beast’s head. It shook Cyprian viciously, growling with the resurgent stubborn rage of the jungle. A slave rushed forward with a spear. The great cat, stabbed to the heart, rolled from over its victim. His cries had ceased.

The next morning, throughout Alexandria, the rumor spread that Cyprian, son of Philamon, lay dead in Mary’s house.

## XII

### NIGHT-TIME on the Nile.

On either side of the river were high clay banks, cut with sluices and water-wheels, and indented by small bays. In the valley long stretches of sterile sand-bars and mud-banks alternated with vast fields, irrigated by the rising of the waters, and now green with new wheat. The desert was everywhere about, now retreating from the valley, but never out of sight, the escarpment of its fearsome mountains ever looming in the distance with an eternal menace, and again and again advancing with a reassertive threat of arid conquest to the banks of the Nile itself, obtruding irregular ranges into the fertile regions of the riverside. These abruptly rising promontories of red sandstone were honeycombed with tombs, out of the top-most tiers of which, now and then—cleaving with their roots ornately chiselled sarcophagi and finding sustenance in the mummied bodies therein—clumps of puny date palms reared fronded fans against an argent sky.

In verdurous vales between the broken highlands, or along the shores of quiet bays, set amid gardens elaborately terraced, were villas of wealthy land-owners, some with casements alight, whence came the sound of late merry-making. Blackly blotching the landscape were scorched, sinister wastes where massive monoliths crumbling into dust, the still-yawning pylons of fallen temples, and erect, prodigious pillars of annihilated palaces marked the necropoli of perished cities. Through the irrigated fields, barren spaces, and over the advancing desert cliffs alike ran the public highroads—silent, sinuously-winding silver threads whereupon, for centuries, had passed Egypt's oppressed and unremembered toilers, its laborers, slaves, prisoners of war, the work of whose hands—monuments, temples, pyramids—in perpetuating the names of the great bore even greater witness to the futility of earth's vain-glory and the brevity of all temporal power. In the river, amid the tangled embroidery of water lilies, great hippopotami, breathing heavily, lifted bulky heads and gazed glassily at the stars. Among the papyrus rushes along the shore the crocodile, the heron, and

the ibis slept. A world of insect life hummed like a mighty stringed instrument; frogs deafeningly shrilled their monotonous chorus. From the boughs of the palm trees in the valleys bulbuls fugitively burst into swells of song. High in the heavens, unchanging over the changes of earth-time and death, soared a full, triumphant moon.

From the stern of an ornately painted and gilded pleasure barge lazily drifting down the river a boy's soprano voice arose in one of the love odes of Theocritus. In the sweetly swelling volume there seemed to expand the desire of human hearts for love, the ache of lips for kisses, of barren arms and bosoms for embraces; something, too, of that urge of life for expression which, in winter seasons, aches in the submerged dumb underworld of the dead, and which, with Nature's nuptial gladness, breaks forth in the jubilant resurrection of Spring. The song celebrated what, to the monks in the cliff-tombs, was the epitome of evil, but which in reality is the cosmic breath that animates the earth, throbs in human hearts, and swells from the throats of birds; that thunders in storms and purls tenderly in running brooks; which clothes fields with wheat and crimson barren spaces with poppies; which vitalizes each drop of water of the sea, and which, quickening the universe with divine desire, in their orbits moves the sun and stars. Over river and shore—over wheat-fields where slaves slept in hovels and over barren cities of the dead where only lizards slimily crawled, into the hollow vastness of mighty temples where stone gods brooded in their oblivion, and into tombs where the ascetics engaged in prayer and contemplated eternal damnation and death—the voice carried its clamant message of the immortal persistence of life and its eternal demand for renewing fruition. Disquieted, the monks paused in their prayer, some closing their ears, some cursing the singer. As if the boy's song were an evil summons, the holy men in the sarcophagi near to them heard restless stirrings, and, so they affirmed among themselves, in beams of moonlight entering the burial places many beheld the painted figures on the walls take life, draw breath, and reach forth yearning and temptingly alluring arms.

The high stem of the barge was carved into the likeness

of a phoenix head, the bird's two gigantic wings, hewn of wood and covered with plates of gold, extending backward and embracing the forward deck, thus giving to the boat the appearance of a mighty bird rising in flight over the water. From holes in the lower tiers thirty rowers gently dipped gilded oars. Between the phoenix wings was a pavilion, its awnings of Tyrian purple, heavily hung with silver tassels, drawn. Reclining on the flower-strewn deck were a dozen maidens with cytheras, theorbos, and flutes. Perfumed gums burned in braziers. Fanned with peacock plumes by black slaves, Mary lay on a divan, piled high with pillows, within. Through half-closed lids her eyes listlessly contemplated the great Triton figure of a man who reclined on the deck by her side. Of heroic bulk, the man's skin was white, his beard and long, flowing mane of hair were yellow. His features were grim and rugged, his cheeks marked by deep-seamed scars. In his ears were barbaric rings, about his forehead a massive fillet of gold. He wore ill-becoming Egyptian costume and was laden with jewels.

"Likest thou the song, my Seiggir?" asked Mary, softly, as Nourjean concluded.

The giant stirred, and, taking Mary's listless hand, replied:

"'Tis a pleasant song, but lacking in the rugged and stirring qualities of the sagas we sing in the North. It is well in keeping with the effeminacy of you Greeks, with your pictures and statues, and those softening influences that have destroyed the virility of Rome. I tell thee, fairest among women, as I have often said to thee, the men of the North will conquer. Goths and Huns will sweep downward from the mountains; thus will a new empire be born. The South and East are effete and weak; your philosophies, your art, your religions are emasculated. In the North we are strong—strong in our might, our hates, our loves! Thither, I tell thee, would I take thee. I would show thee our mountains gleaming like silver, the fiery curtains of Valhalla shaking in the skies of our long night. Yea, again I ask thee—wilt thou go with me?"

"Go with thee—and leave Alexandria?" Mary murmured, doubtfully shaking her head.

"Yea, I am weary of this land of death. Its heat, its tombs, its deserts stifle me! Thou didst persuade me to take this journey up this mud stream—hast thou enjoyed it? We have been parched with heat, have seen nothing but ruins, have harpooned a few sluggish hippopotami. By the gods, thou shouldst know the sport of capturing the horned elephants of our northern seas! By Odin, I would be away on the living ocean! Tell me—thou hast dallied and held me off! Wilt thou join me on my voyagings? Wilt thou share my fate? I love thee—I love thee as only we men of the North know how to love."

Mary marked the leonine strength of her lover, his brawny muscles, his eyes hard as flint and blue as the sky. The deep vibrance of his voice thrilled her.

"Thou askest much," said she. "All my life have I spent in Alexandria."

"Ask me whatever thou wilt—it shalt be given thee! Thou hast said thou art indebted to the Jews—I will pay off thy debts. Needest thou money?—a fortune shall I settle upon thee. Desirest thou a ship?—thou shalt have the finest of my galleons. Wouldst thou possess a palace? Of many, have I one of rare beauty on the Ganges, of marble carved as delicately as lace. Its domes swell like silver moons into the sky. Its porticoes look upon gardens of palms, with lakes like burnished mirrors. In the limbs of the trees are white peacocks. Thou shalt sit upon a throne and command a thousand slaves."

Mary listened; her face, passive, indifferent, gave no hint of the eager agitation of her mind. Appraisingly she studied her lover through the curtains of her lowered eyelids. Mary had lost no whit of her cunning; more than ever she was mistress of her arts. In winning this man Mary realized she played the greatest—perhaps the final—game of chance of her life.

Of the picturesque characters who appeared in those days, Seiggir, merchant-prince of the seas, was one of the most famed. He was the subject of story-telling and legend, the hero of myths. He owned squadrons of galleys, carried on a vast commerce among the world's ports, and monopolized a great portion of the corn business between Alexandria and

Rome. Beside his legitimate undertakings, it was rumored he carried on a terrible career of plundering on the high seas. Venturing into unknown oceans, he had discovered new lands, had conquered islands of blacks where he was hailed as chief and king. On mysterious expeditions he garnered fabulous spoils; he was said to have island caves filled with gold and jewels the size of ostrich eggs. His squadrons were manned by fierce and savage men. His rowers were slaves kept in chains. Once an escaped slave in an inn at Cnidus had told hair-raising tales of piracy, of the capture of ships and the murder of their crews.

Hearing this, thereafter, Seiggir clove the tongues from the mouths of all his rowers. Thus appalling rumors had their origin. A veritable Croesus of the oceans, Seiggir was admired and feared. He came from the North, but many lands claimed him; in various countries he was known by different names. Men trembled before him. As for women, they flung themselves at his feet, only indifferently to be tossed aside.

When, a month before, Seiggir came to Alexandria to settle a business dispute with some Jew traders—a matter speedily effected on his arrival—one of his shipmasters, who had previously visited Mary, induced him, and only with much argument, to go to her house. Mary had heard of Seiggir; for a multitude of reasons she found in him a most desirable lover. Mary intuitively understood the man with whom she had to deal. To his amazement, Seiggir found the courtesan haughty, courteously aloof in manner, and apparently unimpressed by his reputation. He recounted to her some of his most marvelous experiences; he found her but an indifferent listener. Withal, her wit, her knowledge of affairs, her keen intelligence amazed him. Accustomed to the fawning adulation of women, Seiggir now found in Mary one who won his respect. More, denying him, Mary excited in the giant a passion as powerfully intense as it was grimly determined. He decided—what Mary designed—that, at all costs, he would win her. They went, at Mary's suggestion, upon a pleasure jaunt up the Nile—a trip monotonous enough, but which afforded Mary the opportunity of better acquainting herself with Seiggir and of learning to play upon his emotions as her girls played upon the strings of

the harp. In a week this warrior-pirate, master of the seas, was completely enmeshed in Mary's thrall. Of him Mary asked nothing; consequently he offered all that she might desire. To him she refused even her lips; therefore he determined she was the one woman who should share his life. The personality of few men had ever so thrilled Mary. Unlike the effete men of the South, his heroic qualities of cruelty and strength, the romantic glamour of his adventures, his terrible exploits, his fabulous wealth, piqued her imagination. She respected and admired him. He was of the race of the gods—Mary felt this was not a vain boast. But did she love him? What material things he could give her was of supreme importance—and for that she played her femininely wise and subtle game. To the passion that burned in his rugged heart Mary to herself had to acknowledge she was unresponsive, utterly and coldly indifferent.

Her hand played idly in Seiggir's blonde hair.

"Thou sayest thou hast spent all thy days in Alexandria," he pleaded urgently. "Therefore shouldst thou see the world. Wouldst thou wither as the rose in the desert? Alexandria is a barren hole. Come with me, visit the cities of the world, let nations feast upon thy beauty! Thy fame hath reached unto far lands—beyond the seven seas one of my captains first told me of thee. Though, I swear, then I paid little heed to his ravings. Come with me! Should an empress remain within the walls of her palace? Nay, she should fare far, that the world may bow before her. Come—share my fate! Thou shalt have a gilded galleon with sails of Tyrian purple hemmed with silver bells that ring in the breeze. Musicians shall make sweet music by night and day for thee. In the harbors thou shalt be hailed as the true daughter of the gods!"

Mary's nostrils dilated in the prospect of such splendid journeyings but she shook her head with feigned reluctance.

"Go with me! I will take thee to the world's strangest lands—to a region where it is so hot the sun roasts the birds as they roost upon the limbs of trees, and to a continent where the mountains are of ice and the feathers of magical birds fall from the skies."

"One of thy shipmasters once told me of such a land,"

said Mary reminiscently. "How strange! Almost thou temptest me. Verily, I would hold out my hands and gather those silver feathers and watch them vanish beneath my breath."

"Yea, and to even more wonderful countries will I take thee." Seiggir struck his knee emphatically with his fist. "There is an island where a monstrous bird nests upon a mountain-top. When it rises in flight it hides the sun, and night falls. Under the beat of its wings the seas storm. Once, by Odin, I lost two goodly ships. There is a land where elephants fight by the thousand among themselves; the sound of their stampede is as the sound of thunder; they tear up trees by their roots. There we get great shiploads of ivory. There is an island where the men are no taller than my knee-joint; they are hairy like apes and have old faces. It is said they live to the age of many thousands of years. In distant oceans I have seen serpents with wings, and in a far country bats with the heads of women. These are said to visit men by night and suck the blood from wounds in the neck. Once came one of my captains to a continent where men's heads like cocoanuts grow by the hair from the limbs of trees. By night, in a strange tongue, they converse among themselves. I swear, 'tis the strangest of all the world's fruit."

"Thou tellest wondrous tales," said Mary in a low, awed voice, her gaze wandering over the moon-silvered river.

"Wilt thou go with me?"

Mary shook her head. "I must think—there are many things to consider," said she.

Should she go with him? For a long time Mary had experienced no little anxiety concerning her future. Since the death of Cyprian an unlucky fate had dogged her. Vain, as are all women, she was not blind to the wane of her own popularity. In her mirror she had marked, with misgivings, the faintest tracings of lines in the corners of her eyes. Outside her palace doors she had heard the voices of monks raised in reviling. Sometimes fanatic mobs gathered; the ascetics called down fire and brimstone from heaven upon her dwelling. The mobs, howling, picked up stones; on several occasions priceless casements of colored glass had been smashed to fragments. Once, indeed, rioters had beaten at the grilled door with staves, and



the women of her house had fled to the gardens in terror. Caius Marcellus had apprised her of a plan submitted to the Emperor by the Patriarch Theophilus which related to a vigorous campaign against vice and the wholesale suppression of such houses as gave scandal in the city. Caius had warned Mary of the powerlessness of the prefect should the Emperor ratify the schedule of the archbishop by an imperial rescript. Mary knew, too, that Philamon, with all the power of his wealth, was scheming with the Patriarch for her undoing. She knew that at his instigation mobs assailed her house; his oboli paid the *polloi* to insult her when she appeared on the streets. True, children and beggars still sang songs in her honor; but she realized that, had she and her admirers not flung coins, they would as lief insult her with opprobrious epithets. In the circus a thousand men, as one being, still held their breath when she appeared. But the spectacle no longer gratified her.

She knew that infamous scandals were rife concerning her; that she was accused of unspeakable abominations, of murders and sorceries, and was the object of vile stories and vulgar jokes. She was not blind to the obscene leers and suggestive by-play of the men she passed on the street. Had she lived wisely Mary might have garnered an immense fortune; capricious and extravagant, she had dissipated her wealth recklessly. Her debts to the Jews had accumulated; their exactions had become unbearable; indeed, she now found it difficult to secure loans. Fearing the influence of the Christians, many of Mary's richest and most liberal admirers, after the death of Cyprian, ceased to visit her. Consequently Seiggir's wooing was more desired and opportune than the seamaster was given to know.

To leave Alexandria meant that she would escape both the pestering annoyance of creditors and the menace of the Christians. It meant that she should find new realms for amorous victory, perchance become the favorite of new cities. As she had often longed, she could embark upon voyages of adventure and discovery. Should she ever find such love as her heart desired, and peace? In new worlds, in far lands? The wonder-tales of the seaman allured her.

"I have found lagoons where the waters are of the color of

blood and where black men bring pearls of great size from the sea. Desirest thou gems?—thou shalt possess seven caverns, filled with as many different stones! Diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, amethysts, opals, and pearls in abundance shall I give thee. Desirest thou gold?—thou shalt be given mines where slaves work as ants; cargoes heavy enough to sink great ships. Lovest thou perfumes?—thou shalt have ambergris, and cumin, and aloes, and spices; the rarest gums of Arabia and ointments from India. Mary of Alexandria, what more can I offer thee? Wilt thou come with me?”

Mary patted Seiggir's rough cheek gently.

“What canst thou offer me? Thy love, Seiggir! This alone would lure me, as the star of the north that guides thy ships, unto new realms with thee. But the love of men is inconstant, their fancy fitful.”

The big man drew near to her and swore a great oath. His arm encircled her waist.

“Mary of Alexandria, never have I thus made love to any woman. Ever did I despise thy sex. Women ever bowed before me that my heel might trample upon their necks. In sooth, most women are as cattle; in the north-land they work with the oxen in the fields. But thou art more than woman! I am a rough man. But I have lived; I know life; I know men. By Thor, thou hast the intelligence of a man. Thou art beautiful beyond all women I have ever seen—and women have I had throughout the world of all colors—red, yellow, white, black. I have said we men of the North are strong—strong in our love, strong in our hate, strong in our constancy. Never have I desired woman beyond the hour. Thee I desire for all my life. Never have I shared my ambitions, my hopes, my conquests with any living man. Yea, and I have had friends for whom I have fought, over whose dead bodies mine eyes have wept. Thee would I have share my voyagings, my adventures, my quests, my most secret thoughts, my life. Come with me—learn to master ships! Ride the waves! Read the astrolabe, follow the guiding of sun and stars! Come with me—thou shalt command fleets in battle! As Semiramis, thou shalt conquer savage tribes and become the suzerain of new nations. Thou wert made to rule in the world, Mary—over cities as

## BEHOLD THE

women of her house had as Marcellus had apprised the emperor by the Patriarch. The rigorous campaign against vice in such houses as gave scandal in the city of the powerlessness of the emperor. The schedule of the archbishop knew, too, that Philamoneus, who was scheming with the emperor, knew that at his instigation he paid the *polloi* to insult her. True, children and beggars; but she realized that, having coins, they would as lief insult her. In the circus a thousand of their breath when she appeared gratified her.

She knew that infamous scandal she was accused of unspeakable sorceries, and was the object of. She was not blind to the play of the men she passed. Only Mary might have garnered such and extravagant, she had debts to the Jews had become unbearable; indeed, she was. Fearing the influence of the most and most liberal admirer, he visited her. Consequently, it was more and opportune than the. To leave Alexandria meant the suffering annoyance of creditors. It meant that she should, Mary, P.

his man's power he will become a tyrant; per-  
and abusive. Nevertheless, so long as he is  
be in my power. He hath great wealth. I  
to man can outdo the wit of a wise woman."  
and the legend of the beautiful princess and  
husband, a jealous jinn, was about to sleep  
basket so that she might not prove unfaithful.  
er the casket was sunken in mid-ocean.  
aps or on the peaks of mountain  
ours with nigh to seven hundred men.  
shall arrive at Alexandria. From the mud dipped  
e out of this mud stream! I saw the  
pyramid, or a tomb again. In the  
th on burning ships. Wailing  
Mary, beloved of my heart,  
ou go with me from this  
Wilt thou share my fate?  
y hast. At once, if thou  
gether."  
g low, placed her lips  
—to-morrow," she  
this night alone—  
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ance, wending to far  
can die."  
ck impatience she clasped  
ingly starward.  
nest the earth in spring!  
love in life or death as may  
The love of men is as a bitter  
Queen Isis, answer me! Is  
osophers dream of in the bosom  
ve? Or are they figments of the  
aught beyond death? Oh moon!  
dead, answer me! In life or death  
find that which will ease and bring

sad and slumbrous, extended on either  
highroads black specks began to  
and slaves going to their labors  
led. Wearily, Mary's gaze  
er heart those questions that  
and to every man born of  
humanity's two most stupendous

over men's hearts! Come, I shall give thee palaces, wealth, slaves, islands that are as jewels in blue-green seas; I shall make a queen of thee even as thou hast made of me—me, who until now as Odin's son have loved only roving, and battles, and victories of warfare and the wealth of earth—a man!"

His voice sobbed with the appeal of passion. Drawing Mary near to him, he lay his great head upon her breast. His hands, with a strange, fearful gentleness, caressed her gauze-swathed limbs. Mary thrilled as she felt his giant body trembling close to her.

"Seiggr, bear with me; let me now alone—there are many things to consider. To-morrow I will answer thee."

The man looked up into Mary's eyes. "Lovest thou me not?" he asked, a pained tension in his voice.

"I have told thee thy love is of greater worth to me than riches," softly whispered Mary.

"Lovest thou me not?" he insisted fiercely.

"Methinks, my friend, I have never really loved any man."

Seiggr sucked in the breath between his teeth. "Then," he cried, "will I teach thee to love me! Valhalla! have I conquered kingdoms to fail to conquer the heart of a woman?"

"Thus have men ever spoken," Mary sighed wearily. "'I will teach thee to love me.' Curious arrogance of men! But hearken, Seiggr mine, perchance I shall go with thee—but what, then, if thy love, or mine, should wane? The fancy of men is fitful—more so is the fancy of woman!"

She smiled tauntingly. Seiggr seized her hand—the fierceness of his clasp made her gasp for pain.

"Thou shalt be free," he declared. "Whatever betides, thou shalt be free! So do I love thee I should never force my love upon thee nor seek of thee an unwilling kiss."

"How like a man thou speakest!"

"I have put to death many hundreds of men and have felt no pity; I have exulted in the odor of blood; I have violated women in battle. Thou, Mary, hast taught me to be gentle."

Gazing upon him her heart trembled.

"The volcano sleeps silently ere it engulfs the world with fire," she reflected to herself. "The snake strikes silently. The fiercest men are sometimes the most deceptively gentle."

Once I am in this man's power he will become a tyrant; perchance jealous and abusive. Nevertheless, so long as he is jealous he will be in my power. He hath great wealth. I fear him not. No man can outdo the wit of a wise woman."

Mary recalled the legend of the beautiful princess who, whenever her husband, a jealous jinn, was about to sleep, was locked in a casket so that she might not prove unfaithful, but who, whether the casket was sunken in mid-ocean, or placed in tree-tops or on the peaks of mountains, escaped so that she had amours with nigh to seven hundred men.

"Soon we shall arrive at Alexandria. Praise be to Odin, we shall be out of this mud stream! I never want to see a sphinx, a pyramid, or a tomb again. In the north-land we go to our death on burning ships. Warrior maidens bear us to Valhalla! Mary, beloved of my heart, thou must decide! Wilt thou go with me from this country of pestilence and heat? Wilt thou share my fate, my fortune? My heart thou utterly hast. At once, if thou say the word, we shall go hence together."

Mary, bending low, placed her lips upon Seiggir's eyes.

"To-morrow—to-morrow," she purred, "I will let thee know. Give me this night alone—to think."

Carried away by a gust of desire, Seiggir drew her to him, covering her forehead, her hair, her cheeks with ardent kisses. But she turned away her mouth.

"The hour grows late," whispered Mary, pushing him away. "Seiggir, dear, let me be alone."

With a fierce sob he closed his mighty arms about her. His lips devoured her face, her neck. Then, suddenly, by a mighty effort of will, his embrace relaxed.

"I go," he said. "I, who have commanded ships obey thy wish. He who shall be master of others must be master of himself. 'Twould be easier, Mary, to crush thee in my arms and bend thee to my will. But I love thee so, I will be strong."

Bending, he kissed the hem of her robe. Leaning over, Mary took his face between the palms of her hands and gave to him, for the first time, her lips.

"The gods give thee gentle sleep," she breathed, and he

arose. Her eyes kindled as she watched him striding toward his pavilion in the aft of the boat.

"Methinks I shall go with this sea robber," she meditated; "yea, though eventually his jealousy will oppress me and his love bore me. But I shall be away from those dogs of Christians! I shall take his jewels, his gold, his palaces. Yea, I shall share his quests. As Aphrodite I shall go over the seas. New cities shall hail me as Helen returned to the earth." Rising, she dismissed the musicians. "Away! I would be alone."

Noiselessly the barge drifted down-stream. Now and then it passed rafts and smaller craft, loaded with merchandise, bound for the trading places of the Delta. From the shore came the cry of a heron. Mary's gaze rested upon a cliff cut with royal tombs.

"Those dead women yonder," she mused, "did they die longing for an unrealized rapture beyond human bearing? Did they die as weary as I am with life? In the dry powder of their hearts, once animated with desire and despair, after centuries of decay, worms and scarabæi find food. But what of the spirits that yearned for such love as men had not to give, and for such ecstasy as the senses are inadequate to afford? Have they perished in the darkness?—have their souls dissolved as smoke? Or do they, as the philosophers would have us believe, pass on from life to death and from death into life again? Holy gods, the contemplation of that ceaseless cycle driveth one to madness! What if death is as void as life; what if, between the sleeping and the waking, one wearies, too, of death! In all the universe, what peace, what rest is there? Is death oblivion without annihilation?—or a sleep-imprisonment within a nightmare more tedious and wearily tiring than life? Yonder, worms eat the lips and hearts of those women of the dead—but the very air of night seems to sigh with the unrequited desires of centuries!"

Mary sighed heavily. It truly seemed, as she gazed upon the quarried tombs, that there existed between her and the dead women of past dynasties some vague yet integral relationship; as though through the river of the ages, their unrealized desires had accumulated and reservoired within her heart;

as though her lips hungered with the hunger of their dead lips, as though her arms yearned with the reaching yearning of those love-lorn women's empty arms, as though her own feet were spurred in her nightly quests by the weary restlessness of those women's feet. Within Mary's veins fermented the poison of that fruit of knowledge whereof in Eden the eternal first mother ate—the subtle venom that gave to womankind her baleful allure, her terrible empurpled wisdom.

An hour passed. In his pavilion Mary could hear Seiggir heavily breathing in sleep. In one of the lower tiers of the barge she heard the laughter of two slaves. The oars dipped idly into the water. The moon swam toward the zenith.

"Yea, methinks I shall go with yon roughling," she mused. "I am weary of Alexandria, weary of envy, weary of hate. Do far lands hold some unexperienced thrill for me, some solace of the heart? But yet methinks adventures pall, and, verily, caves of jewels, thrones, and palaces can give no peace."

Her voice sank to a low, crushed whisper.

"I shall go with this man—perchance, voyaging to far countries, I shall find love. If not, I can die."

After a spell of silence, with a sick impatience she clasped her hands and wrung them supplicatingly starward.

"Mother Isis, thou who wakenest the earth in spring! Tell me! Tell me! Is there such love in life or death as may feed the hunger of the spirit? The love of men is as a bitter fruit and as ashes upon the lips! Queen Isis, answer me! Is there such ecstasy as the philosophers dream of in the bosom of the gods? Do the gods live? Or are they figments of the sick brain of man? Is there aught beyond death? Oh moon! Oh stars! Oh world of the dead, answer me! In life or death I care not—shall I ever find that which will ease and bring balm to the soul of me?"

The land of Egypt, sad and slumbrous, extended on either side. On the white highroads black specks began to appear, moving slowly—farmers and slaves going to their labors. In a valley a curlew whistled. Wearily, Mary's gaze wandered from earth to sky, in her heart those questions that come at times to every woman and to every man born of woman—questions concerning humanity's two most stupendous themes,



love and death. But from the stars, from the moon, from the land of the living and the world of the dead came no reply. Turning, Mary rose and drew the purple curtains, closing her couch to the waning night. Flinging herself on her cushions, she closed her eyes prepared to sleep. She rolled and tossed; her limbs like snakes crept through the linens restlessly. Into the darkness she reached her arms, sighing.

Her mouth was dry. Her tongue seemed swollen.

Tossing about, as she extended her arms in the darkness, it seemed she suddenly touched something—palpably cold, slimy, repulsive. With a low cry she sprang to a sitting posture. Vague shadows curled about like smoke. They lifted ragged arms ominously. Burying her face in her hands, Mary groaned.

“I am afraid! The air is warm, and I am cold—cold.” She shuddered. Peering about, she could see nothing. She heard the faint noise of the oars dipping into the water. “I shall be glad to be away—away from this land of death and ghosts; away from Alexandria, that house and its memories! Away from the Christians and their obloquies! Oh gods——” She strained her ears, listening, quaking with sudden fear. From afar she seemed to hear a haunting refrain—piercingly yearning, plangently sweet:

“Grant us in death to see Thy face . . . and . . . endless . . . joy inherit . . .”

In a blinding flash of memory she saw the pillars of the Serapium like trees of stone looming amid the vapors and bearing the dreadful fruit of martyrdom. Clenching her hands with agonized dismay she breathed.

“Ah, to be away on far seas, in new lands! To be away—away from all these hellish memories! By the gods, though I love him not, I swear I will go with this man!”

But, although Mary decided thus, the unalterable divinities that weave the loom of human fate had determined otherwise; and as she lay there shuddering, unable to sleep, feverishly formulating plans, the mysterious unseen Mœræ—“the daughters of the just heavens”—were spinning for her a fabric of destiny more strange, and withal more terrible, than any of which she could have dreamed. Without, laving for centuries a land of death, the Nile ran as silver oil.

### XIII

TOWARD morning the steersman in the aft uttered a loud cry.

Dropping their oars, half the rowers rushed to the deck. Anchor chains rattled; the barge came to a standstill. Aroused from her unsettled slumber by the cessation of the movement of the boat, Mary listened to the clamor outside. Voices of the slaves mingled with the whimpering cries and terrorized sobbing of women. Seiggir's voice rose threateningly, with oaths, calling for grappling irons and ropes. As she arose from her couch, drawing a shawl about her, the curtains of the pavilion parted, and Nourjean, wild-eyed, threw himself at her feet.

"Thy slave Doria, mistress, hath flung herself into the river!"

Adjusting her robes, Mary emerged from the pavilion and moved among the excited throng to the stern. Her face was pale; dark shadows ringed her eyes.

"How did this happen?" she asked Seiggir.

"I know not," answered he, directing the crew in casting nooses and irons into the water. "Yon slave can tell thee better."

Mary addressed the steersman. He was voluble in his account. The girl had come from the slave quarters sparsely dressed, and had paused a long time gazing into the water. The steersman had paid no particular attention to her, for she had come forth thus several mornings. Finally she turned, with wild eyes, made the sign of the cross of the Christians, and leaped. Rushing to the railing, the steersman could see nothing. Calling the rowers, they had put the barge to anchor. As for the sign the girl made, perchance she was signalling the monks on the shore. The steersman did not know. Christians had strange ways of communicating. Gazing shoreward, Mary beheld a procession of gowned figures moving outside the sandstone cliffs. They seemed to be waving palms. Despite the distance, their voices could be heard upraised in an irregular Eastern chant.

Mary leaned over the railing and searched the water. In the roseate dawn the stream had crimsoned; it seemed to run with streaks of blood. Behind the boat a maze of water flowers—the pink and white lotus and red nymphæus—heaved like a blanket while the slaves dragged the waters. Their irons brought up only lilies and mosses.

On either side of the river life had begun to waken; slaves appeared about the sluices and water-wheels; in the bays fishermen were putting out their nets. From the shelter of the cliffs swarms of swallows poured, and in the palm trees larks, godwits, and curlews were singing. Flamingoes, like darts of scarlet flame, flew forth from the willows, and wild geese, with outcries, soared over the waters. While she peered over the river, a white speck arose ahead of the barge. Mary saw, or imagined, a white face, with wide-open, reproachful eyes and golden hair tangled with mosses. Springing back, Mary cried aloud, pointing ahead. At that moment the speck vanished—and a half-dozen crocodile heads rose and sank.

“It is over,” said Seiggir. “The girl has already given breakfast to the crocodiles. Lift the anchors! Rowers, to your places!” Turning to Mary, he added, “Be of good heart; slaves are plentiful; what if one goeth to the fishes!”

He laughed; but his laughter subsided as he observed the drawn expression of pain on Mary’s face. Bending her head, she listened to the far refrain of the monks. Trembling, Mary flung herself into the great man’s arms. “Seiggir, Seiggir, take me away from this accursed land. I want to go. Yea, away from Alexandria! Wherever I go these Christians haunt me. In the city, in the desert, I hear their hymns! ’Tis said they invoke evil upon those they hate. This girl Doria was a Christian—I was ever fond of her! Thou heardst the steersman say she made the sign of the cross before she died—Seiggir, I tell thee these Christians are masters of magic! I fear the curse of their dead.”

The slaves drew up the anchors. Whistling and singing, the oarsmen went to their places. In her pavilion Mary sank upon the couch, Seiggir by her side.

“Last night I beheld dark shadows moving about my couch, Seiggir. In my dreams I saw the faces of Christians

dying upon the pillars of the Serapium. Their curses follow me as evil birds. This girl Doria—Seiggir . . . Seiggir, Seiggir, I am afraid. . . . Seiggir, wilt thou silence those chattering vixens?"

Seiggir shouted at the slave-girls. Silently, but with resentful looks, they vanished into their quarters. Nourjean timidly entered the pavilion and sank at Mary's feet.

"Tell me of this slave Doria," said Seiggir; "who was she? Why doth her death perturb thee?"

"Thou hast heard perchance of the vengeance meted to the dogs some years since when they were sacrificed at the Serapium. This girl I saved from death, though I swear methinks she preferred to die! Twice she ran away and the soldiers brought her back. Of all the little she-devils in my house Doria was faithful and most trustworthy. One night, during the revelries, when I was myself exhilarated with wine, a Roman forced this girl to his embrace. Thereafter she went about like a wild thing—her eyes frightened me. She said no word, made no reproach. But her silence made me fear her! For two months she was as one mad. Often she made the strange sign of the Christians in the air—whenever a stranger approached. Then she would turn and run. Often her eyes were swollen as from much weeping. And now the girl is dead—dead! I often felt she hated me for what occurred that night. Oh, Seiggir, we can protect ourselves against the living—but against the dead who come to us at night and who haunt our sleep and whisper in the stillness—against them we can find no weapons! The dead, Seiggir, are ever triumphant! They come to us, and we cannot escape. I tell thee at night I hear the voices of those who died at the temple of Serapis singing—yea, singing, though they be dead! Gods, my father's eyes stare at me in the night—he was a Christian and I, who hated him, had him slain. Seiggir! Seiggir! If his eyes condemned me it would be more bearable, but they bring only a strange reproach! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

Seiggir took her hand.

"Thou art overwrought and nervous, Mary! Fear not! These dogs have no power; if they know aught of magic it must be as vulgar as their religion. Their god was a carpenter. The

gods of my ancestors were warriors; they rode upon the clouds; their chariot wheels made the sound of thunder; they forged the lightnings; their children for centuries have ridden the horses of the sea."

The boat moved steadily down stream under the pressure of the oars. Far away, from the receding shore, came the last refrain of the cenobites at their matins. Mary clutched Seiggir's arms.

"Seiggir, I will go with thee—anywhere—to the world's end! Anywhere, I tell thee, so I no longer hear the name of Christ."

Seiggir clapped his hands. A Nubian appeared.

"Command the singers! Summon the lyre players! Scatter lilies! Renew the perfumes! Let there be food and wine and song!"

Long fingers of tawny light crept across the sand-hills. The eastern sky glowed with rubescent flame. On the barge slaves scattered fresh flowers. The braziers were filled with live charcoal. Incense fumes arose. While Mary and Seiggir partook of their morning repast, the musicians, reclining on the deck, discoursed various melodies. Exultant in having won Mary's consent to join his voyage, Seiggir drained cup after cup of wine. Now and then his voice rose in one of the boisterous, rollicking saga-songs of the North. Seizing Nourjean playfully by the ear, he shouted:

"Sing, thou Persian stripling! Sing as thou hast never sung! Let us cheer the heart of Mary!"

The fingers of the lyre-players glided over the strings. The cheeks of the flute-players distended. Nourjean, rubbing his aching ear, leaped to his feet and, laughing at Seiggir, broke into song. While he sang, his legs began to dance. Seiggir, shouting, nodded approval.

Once Seiggir proffered his wine-cup to Mary, but with a shake of her head she declined.

"Be of good cheer, loveliest of women! Why let thy heart be sad because a slave has died? The world opens its doors of enchantment before us. We shall soon be away from this parched country of sand and clay. Thou shalt behold battles upon the sea, and captured slaves shall follow thee in chains."

Toward nightfall they entered the canal of Alexandria, and all night glided through Lake Mareotis. Listless, depressed, Mary had listened to Seiggir's tales, to the music, to Nourjean's songs. A vague premonition—of what? was it of danger? of some impending calamity?—had weighed heavily upon Mary's spirit all the day. She felt utterly tired, utterly exhausted with the experiences and worries of years. She felt almost indifferent as to the future. When night fell she lay and gazed blankly at the stars. As Seiggir was about to leave her, at a late hour, she stayed him with her hand.

"Remain by me awhile," she said. "I would not be alone." She was afraid of the shadows, of the voices of dreams.

She quaffed from Seiggir's cup of wine. Seiggir lay on the deck by the side of her couch. Finally Mary slept. When she woke she found Seiggir had gone to his pavilion. The surcease of untroubled sleep had refreshed her. Her lethargy passed. In the dawn she imagined she beheld her own new future. In the distance Mary saw Alexandria looming like some phantasm city out of the sunrise, its base laved by lake-waters, green and golden; its heavy Egyptian buildings gaudily colored; its Greek temples with their Egyptian pillars, its Doric and Ionic palaces, its domes, its blue and red conical towers, its spear-pointed obelisks, all transfigured in an unearthly glory of burning violet, rose, and amber. Behind the Paneum appeared the ruddy rim of the ascending sun. As the barge was making its way amid the countless galleys, boats, and smaller craft in the port, Seiggir appeared. The din of the city grew louder in their ears.

Mary extended her arms. Her eyes glowed.

"Seiggir, Seiggir! Think of it—this perchance shall be my last day in Alexandria! To-morrow I shall fare forth with thee! Ah, Seiggir, I am happy to go with thee whatever betides! Cares have made my spirit heavy, and the jeers of envy and hate have rung in my ears too long! Seiggir, let our farewell be a fitting one! Let us give a banquet to all who may come to-night—to those who, desiring, may ever pine for me; to those who, hating, may ever feel gnawings at their hearts, knowing I am beyond their spite; to those who, jealous, may

never cease to envy me! Let our farewell be a triumphal one! Yea! let trumpets be blown in the streets! Let the beggars be fed! Let runners go forth announcing our going as heralds announce the arrival of kings! Let songs ring in the city to-night! Yea, let the dogs of Christians bark! I shall let Alexandria know I scorn its admiration as I scorn its hate! Ah, Seiggir, they shall remember me when we ride strange seas and visit mighty kings!"

Arm in arm, they descended the gangway of the barge. As they entered a palanquin acclamations arose from the weltering crowd of laborers on the quay.

"Hail, Mary!"

"Lotus of the Nile!"

"Star of Egypt! Hail! Hail!"

Reaching into his embroidered purse, Seiggir flung handfuls of oboli into the air. As the litter was borne toward the esplanade a troop of children, beggars, slaves, and the curious of the populace followed. Beyond the Gate of the Moon the palanquin was stopped in a *mêlée* of traffic—litters, camels, elephants, asses, mules, a congestion of humanity. Mary peered from the curtains, to find the cause of the delay. Ugly cries immediately arose.

"Woman of Babylon! Mistress of abomination! Scourge of the world!"

Her face crimsoned at the insults, and she drew back. At that moment a stone was hurtled through the curtains. Seiggir was about to leap to the street to find the culprit, but Mary restrained him.

"Peace, friend! To-morrow we shall be away from this city, from Theophilus and his rats."

The traffic moved and they passed on up the street.

At her house Mary found a score of guests waiting.

"Let foot-runners be sent forth!" she ordered. "Let heralds announce Mary's departure from Alexandria! Invite the women I know—Priscilla, Eustoie, Potina, Carna, Octavia, Catherine! How they hate me! They shall grow green with rage! Ah, invite to banquet all who have admired me—Caius Marcellus, Lucius, the jeweller; Solomon Ben-Rzra, the foul Jew! He hath pestered me with his advances because I owe

him money!—Claudius Saturnius, the fat pig of a Roman!, Pythagoras, the philosopher; Faustus, Glauco, Helius, the knave of a Chaldean magician! All—all of them! Bid them to my feast! Summon mimes! Summon dancers! Let there be wine in abundance! Bid that fool of a cook surpass himself this night! Let food be given to the beggars! Yea, gather in the hungry carrion from their hovels and the by-ways, for they will loudly shout my praises!” She laughed, clapping her hands. “Oh, ye dogs of Christians, revile me, curse me, spawn your hate of me! I laugh at you! To-morrow I shall be beyond your malice! And to-night the name of Mary shall drown the name of Christ!”



## XIV

THE startling news of Mary's intended departure from the city provoked the greatest excitement. A score of runners, bearing invitations to her farewell banquet, spread the information throughout the metropolis. During the afternoon an army of beggars, expectant of her last largess, gathered in vast numbers in the alleys behind Mary's palace. In the baths, gymnasia, and such public places where men gathered, the report was discussed with mingled regret and incredulous astonishment. Eager to confirm what they heard, many went to Mary's house.

Long before evening the courtyard of Mary's palace was crowded. Courtesans, hating their rival, came to reassure themselves of the truth of the good tidings. When they learned of Mary's conquest of the great mariner-merchant they were consumed with ungovernably envious rage. Men who had not visited the courtesan for years, decked in festive robes, came to bid her farewell. Many brought parting gifts of jewels and flowers. Now that she was leaving the city, powerful men who had long admired Mary felt they could, without danger of being compromised, give her some last token of regard. In the gardens of the mansion musicians discoursed lively melodies all the afternoon. The street without the mansion, as evening fell, became lined with palanquins, curricles, and litters.

On arriving, as was the Greek custom, the guests were escorted to side rooms off the court, where their sandals were removed and their feet washed and perfumed. They were crowned with wreaths of irises, anemones, and roses. In an ante-chamber reserved for the women were all toilet accessories for a final burnishing of their beauty—hairpins, unguents, and dry tints. The guests thronged in great numbers.

Greek boy-slaves escorted them to the hall of the banquet, a vast chamber of noble proportions, oval in shape, reached by a majestic flight of marble steps descending from the main court of the palace. Thousands of lights, burning in colored

Alexandrian glasses, brilliantly illuminated the hall. Spiral clouds of incense rose from brazen tripods. The floors were strewn ankle deep with violets and anemones. In the centre of the hall was a great fountain, with five basins, the leaping sprays of which were colored by rays of light hidden in mossy grottoes. Out of the fountain rose a life-sized figure of Aphrodite. Stately columns of lapis lazuli, of a rich azure speckled like the skin of snakes with gold, supported a vast dome under which was suspended a golden net heavily weighed with flowers. Agitated by silken cords, a rain of petals constantly descended upon the table.

Entering, the guests took their places. They chatted pleasantly with one another. A subdued murmur filled the hall. Ignorant concerning Mary's plans, they questioned one another with unfeigned eager curiosity.

Accustomed as they were to Mary's lavish entertainments, the luxury of the farewell feast surprised and amazed them. The table, shaped like a horseshoe, glittered with vessels of gold, crystal, and silver. Four thousand candles burned in silver candelabra; from massive lampadaries were suspended hundreds of lights in glasses the color of every jewel. The byssus cloth of the table was covered with irises, lotus flowers, orange and acacia blossoms. About the walls of the chamber were ranged the musicians and choirs.

When Mary appeared the guests arose, lifting their cups. The hall thundered with ovations.

"Star of Egypt!"

"Phædra!"

"Aspasia!"

"Gate of Dawn! Garden of Delight!"

"Of old Helen! To-day Mary!"

"Hail! Hail!"

"Why dost thou leave us? What of the desolate tidings? When wilt thou return?"

Caius Marcellus wailed:

"The sun sets upon Alexandria! O totoi! O totoi!\* The earth becometh barren! The moon pales from anguish! The stars close their golden eyes and weep!"

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\* Greek expression of lamentation—used in the dramas of *Æschylus*.

Almachus, already besotted, declaimed:

"The fire that heaven has kindled dies! All sweet things flee as our summer is fled! O beautiful one, my dream it is dead." He babbled tearfully, "My heart is as an incense vase she hath shattered. My songs she will not hear."

At the head of the table Mary paused, lifting her cup. All drank.

She addressed her guests:

"I have here with me my friend, Seiggir, of whose fame you have heard, and with whom I depart on the morrow. Drink to his health and mine! Drink that, upon my return to Alexandria, I may tell you of marvellous voyages."

Turning to the right and left, she introduced Seiggir, mentioning the names of some of the most eminent at the table. Amid acclamations they drank to the seaman. Men and women alike devoured Mary with their eyes. She was resplendent.

Mary was imperially robed in a shimmering tissue of gold, draped in diagonal folds about her sinuous figure, the long train, borne by dwarf negro boys, who resembled frisky monkeys, with huge white teeth, grinning lips, and frizzled hair. The train spread behind her like a pool of liquid light. The mantle was bordered deep with water lilies embroidered in pearls, the stamens studded with liquidly yellow topazes, and the foliage in gleaming emeralds. Her waist was clasped with a serpentine girdle set with diamonds and sapphires. Her bare arms were encircled with hoops of massy gold inlaid with turquoise; her wrists and fingers glittered with jewels. Wound many times about her neck, and hanging down over her bosom below the waist, were ropes of rose-pearls of huge size, strung on a golden chain. From her ears weighed heavy ear-rings of gold, crescent shaped, from which depended long pear-shaped emeralds. Her hair, curled and gummed, glistened with electrum, a powder of gold alloyed with silver. A victor's laurel wreath of chased gold, the leaves encrusted with emeralds, crowned her imperially.

Despite the vermilion on her cheeks, her face seemed wan, and dark shadows accentuated the melancholy weariness of her sultry eyes. Mary reclined on cushions at the head of the table. The couch whereon she reclined was sprinkled with a

sparkling amber dust, and whenever she stirred on the cushions a goldenish hazy transplendence rose up and filled the air about her. Back of her Nubians waved peacock fans set with brilliants.

"Let the feast begin," she said. At her feet, amid her tiny, grotesque train-bearers, sat Nourjean, his face painted, his finger-nails gilded. He made taunting grimaces at the slaves as they passed. Feasting his eyes upon her beauty, and himself regarded covetously by the other women, Seiggir reclined at Mary's right. On her left, glum of visage, unfeignedly low in spirits, Caius Marcellus drained goblet after goblet of wine.

The feast commenced.

Within the horseshoe enclosure of the table attendants assiduously served the guests. Relays of slaves, herculean and blacker than night, bore on their heads great platters of painted earthenware from the kitchens. The first course consisted of fish floating in pickle, lamprey eels, callichthys, oysters, gray mullet, cuttle-fish, the purple pompile, and soups containing all varieties of fish in the Mediterranean, stewed in oil and flavored with saffron and asafoetida. There followed baked grasshoppers, honeyed locusts, flamingo tongues covered with mushrooms, and herons' eggs floating in a wine sauce. The guests helped themselves and, as was the custom of the time, gorged themselves prodigiously, washing down mouthfuls of food with wine. Processions of servants constantly bore amphoræ of wine from the cellars—there were wines of Safed and Byblus, of Sorek and Engedi, flavored with spices and sweetened with honey. The wine was poured from the amphoræ into massive craters of silver, and thence into cups of gold and myrrhine glass which were cooled in tubs of snow covered with vine leaves. As the wine flowed, the hubbub of conversation rose, sometimes drowning the music.

At the farther end of the hall was a gilded stage. The curtain rose upon a scene of rare Arcadian beauty, a meadowland green with grass; in the distance, skilfully painted, the blue *Ægean* Sea. The time was late afternoon. On a bed of purple hyacinths slept a Greek shepherd lad, of exquisite beauty, his crook in hand.

The master of the entertainment announced that Empedocles, the celebrated mime, was about to enact a pantomime depicting the abduction by Zeus of Ganymede. Harps resounded. To the music, Empedocles, clothed in feathers and representing the divine eagle, softly soared down from the Olympian sky. The diners watched with breathless delight. Swung by invisible wires, the eagle swooped upon the youth. Seizing him in his taloned arms, the huge bird bore him aloft. The bird's wings trembled; the tail distended fan-like with the god's exultant delight. Uttering a loud call, the celestial eagle rose into the air, disappearing in a fictitious sky. The banqueters clapped their hands and shouted approval.

A toast was drunk to Mary:

"Thou whose shoulders are fairer than the moon! Thou whose breasts are softer than the doves that nest in the gardens of the Hesperides! Hail! Hail!"

As Mary lifted her glass, all quaffed the toast.

"Hail to her more glorious than the Valkyries!" shouted Seiggrir. "May she ride the seas as Brunhilde rides the air!"

Caius Marcellus threw his goblet upon the floor.

"Fools!" he bawled to the joyous crowd. "Fools! Rather weep, for this is the funeral-feast of the loves! Aphrodite is about to vanish in the skies! Lo, her doves die of grief! Weep, all who say farewell to Mary! Eternal night descends! The star of Egypt dissolves in the dark!" He fell over on his couch, burying his face in his hands, and gave way to inebriate sobbing. Mary signalled the leader of the Athenian choir. They began a song of Harmodious. She summoned her head steward. A relay of slaves brought more wine.

"Regret me if you will, my friends," called Mary when the song was done. "But weep not!" She solicitously patted Caius's hand. "Yea, I go hence—later to return. I have lived here many years and I would see the marvels of the world. Bethink you, what if Aphrodite had ne'er gone beyond Cyprus! Where'er I go I shall represent the glory of Alexandria and spread her fame. Think of me with kindness, for I shall miss you all. I have heard the spinning of the Fates at their loom! Changes have been brooding, and I yearn for change! But drink to the gods, and wish me well!"

Thunders of applause followed.

"Changes—ha! She must have recognized herself after the bath!" said Eustoie, whose face, heavily enamelled, showed crow's-feet. "Wise is she who knoweth when her beauty fades. Even paint cannot conceal that she fadeth. Ha, life is strange—we who are discreet and decent ever miss the smile of fortune. Yet I wager her last lover is more desirable than her first, whom I suppose she has forgotten."

"What woman remembers her first lover?" slobbered Almachus. "Strain not thy memory, Eustoie! I was by no means thy first, though I remember thee from the time I was a child."

"She hath a gift of cunning," hissed Potina, glaring at Mary. "She knoweth the day of her decline hath come—she doth well to retire."

"And to leave the business of Venus in the hands of those less wise," sneered Almachus, who sat between the two courtesans. "'Tis strange, women ever see the age of others! How their mirrors must lie!"

The two women snapped at him like angry cats.

"I swear there are circles under her eyes," said Potina.

"Look at that miserable ass!" Eustoie pointed toward Caius, drunkenly weeping. "He is like an elephant carried away by grief! I would as lief have a hippopotamus bewail my departure!"

"A fitting mourner," sneered Potina. "They say this seaman hath the wealth of an emperor."

"For all we know, he may lock our Mary in a cage, or kill her. I would not trust myself with him."

"Thou, art become suddenly discerning," jeered the poet. "He would lock thee in a cage that he might never see thee!"

"I would I were leaving Alexandria!" sighed Potina. "Times are changing—things are not as they were."

"Hast thou heard the news?" whispered Carna. "Yesterday, so they say, Theophilus received from the Emperor a rescript approving the execution of a plan which shall mean a restriction of our privileges. Perchance worse!" The other women leaned forward, with looks of alarm on their faces.

"I had no warning," said one. "And John, one of Theophilus's deacons, who often visits me, is a friend. Is there actual danger? What hast thou heard?"

"The bearded dog would burn our houses, confiscate our jewels, shut us into prisons or monasteries!" declared Carna. "'Tis said the rescript has just come, authorizing the hell-dog to wipe out what he calls vice in Alexandria! Look to yourselves! I have put away my jewels, and am prepared any day to set sail. In Ostia I have a friend."

The painted creatures paled.

"Persephone in Hades!" muttered Octavia. "If only some one had the courage to kill the Emperor!"

"Kill the Emperor! Treason! Treason!" Those who heard were struck dumb with terror.

Catherine, a slender wisp of a woman, with a face possessing the pale charm of moon-lilies, and black, wise eyes of inordinate size, said:

"I shall become a Christian. Personally I believe in no gods. Why not confess one as another? There is the Jewess Salome. She feared the monks, so she went to the Patriarch and was baptized. Of course, she still receives her lovers, and makes more money than ever! Each week she goes to church, and of her earnings gives, so she claims, a tenth to the Patriarch. 'Tis not a bad investment for protection. Consequently she is not menaced by monks nor denounced by priests. 'Tis an example I am sure many of us will be constrained to follow."

"Methinks the trappings of virtue will befit thee strikingly," laughed Almachus.

The pale beauty smiled.

"Yea," said she, "if women were only aware of the novelty of chastity, they would assume it as a seductive guise. Hypocrisy is never without its charm. Yea, I have decided—I shall become a Christian. Verily, modesty is the next art to be mastered by our sex. Perchance Christianity may serve a purpose in enhancing women with the charm of an unviolated maidenliness. It will declare that all women shall be chaste, and all will pretend to be. Then, in men's eyes, they will consequently bear a mythical prize on their persons. Men will

cease to despise them. Moreover, each man in his amours will have the joy of being an imaginary conqueror, of securing a trophy no rival in the race of love has won! That, too, will please his vanity. Women, of course, being more sophisticated and less truthful, will become more corrupt—but more delightful!”

Whilst she spoke, Nourjean began to sing. When he finished, Almachus, his face inflamed with drink, arose and declaimed a verse celebrating Mary's departure. He hic-coughed constantly. His beady eyes popped, his fat hands moved creepily in the air as he recited.

The second course was brought on—there were sand grouse, Phasian pheasants, pelicans, ospreys, and white peacocks roasted at a slow heat for two days so as not to scorch their feathers, bulls' kidneys, minced meat roasted in vine leaves, curious hashes and ragouts, black in color, and quarters of red beef surrounded by baked pastries forming odd designs. Finally five slaves brought among them, on a massive platter, a roast wild boar, its feet doubled up, its eyes half open, the pores of its shaven skin steaming redolently; the belly stuffed with larks, nightingales, quails, and savory sauces. The golden wine of Syracuse flowed from leathern bottles into craters like ceaseless fountains.

Mary talked with Seiggir and the philosophers. There are two subjects inevitably discussed at banquet-tables and by men when they are drunk—these concern the mystery of the Deity and the destiny of man. Perhaps, being of the most profound import to humankind, they are too confounding for consideration in hours of sobriety.

“Man always creates his god in his own image,” said Pythagoras, a philosopher, spilling wine over his beard. “The ineffable is beyond man's comprehension. The Ultimate Father-Mother of the Universe, the Divine Absolute, the germinal essence whence creation springs, is but vaguely symbolized in the imperfect deities men create. These images men invest with their own ideals. They bow in worship to what, after all, is the envisagement of the noblest potentialities in themselves. The god of any race is the highest ideal imaginable to that race. We must not discourage the god-creating



instinct in men, for humanity advances as it strives to imitate the god-ideals evolved by the higher minds of its poets, philosophers, priests.

"The study of gods is not without interest," he continued. "Climate, appetite, national customs, scenic surroundings, heat, cold—all enter into the racial conception of a divinity. Consider the tribal god of the Jews, for example. In the early days when the Israelitish tribes struggled with the unconquered material forces of untamed Nature, securing their sustenance by agriculture and grazing, their chief purpose in life, the means whereby they should survive as a race, was the propagation and increase of the family. Economic necessity, therefore, compelled a man to take many wives. And with many wives, punitive discipline, of course, was necessary."

"Of course, of course!" concurred Aulus, the Roman.

"They therefore developed a rigid family life, ruled arbitrarily by a despotic father—a patriarchal tyrant who maintained his authority by brute force, by means of the scorpion and the rod, the expulsion of recalcitrant wives, and even by the killing of his sons," continued Pythagoras. "Their idea of a god evolved along similar lines. The father, apotheosized, became the divinity, capriciously rewarding and punishing his children, lording it over the tribes from the skies, pettishly demanding sacrifice, making peevish threats, being carried away by vulgar fits of temper, and administering affairs, not according to any code of logic and justice, but solely as his vain, irritable whims dictated. Tyrannizing paternalism reached its climax when the Jewish Yahve demanded the death of his own son to satisfy his ill-bred anger.

"To a race that survives by fathers enslaving their sons and families the god, of course, must uphold the authority of parents and preserve the family sanctity. He must necessarily have the provinciality of the bucolic hearth, and, because of this insularity and self-contented limitation, lack the charm of culture. Father-like," concluded Pythagoras, "this Yahve had no relish for other races, considering the Jews his chosen children."

"By Hercules, what a deity!" exclaimed Helius. "What abominable taste!"

Caius Marcellus, lifting his cumbersome weight, extended his goblet for wine. Wiping the tears from his eyes with the edge of his mantle, he laughed heartily.

"A fulsome, fighting, bickering, cheating, cursed lot of pests—those Jews! A plague of locusts! A curse of flies! Go into their noisy quarter, and you find them at one another, pulling beards, beating each other with staves—all over an oboli! By the gods, I'd hang every Jew who didn't pay his taxes! Go into the court any day and you'll find them at one another's throats. By Jupiter, they make more trouble than any of the revolting provinces!"

"'Tis singular the Christians should so hate them," said Faustus, "for the Christians' god was a Jew."

"I don't wonder that he was deified," said Caius, contemptuously. "So deserved the Jew who had the courage to tell his people to pay their taxes to Cæsar. So they crucified him."

Ben-Ezra, the money-lender, reclined not far away. He heard the insults upon his race in silence. About the table were young profligates, gamblers, scions of the aristocracy, who, while they owed Ben-Ezra money, had for the Jews the intolerable scorn of the time. Taunts of the hated race passed about the table. With that fine race integrity which has enabled the Jews, despite persecutions, to endure through the centuries, Ben-Ezra gave no sign of recognition to the insults. He ate in silence, drank sparingly. Finally the subject of conversation changed—Mary and Seiggir began discussing their proposed voyages; the philosophers fell to arguing; one finally rolled under the table. Some of the guests fell asleep in the laps of dancing-girls. Toward midnight a cry arose:

"Hail! Mary! Mary! Give us the pantomime! Let Aphrodite ascend from the foam! May Helen smile again! Until thou camest unto us, the goddesses were dead! With thee the divinities have returned to the earth!"

Lifting her hand, Mary silenced the salvos with a gesture. As the voices subsided Mary overheard Eustoie, who was already intoxicated, mutter to Potina, in an audible voice:

"Should she perform, hearken—thou wilt hear her bones creak."

Mary smiled upon her guests graciously, deprecatingly, then spoke softly:

"You compliment me, my friends! I am happy the memory of my representations has not palled upon you. Perhaps it is your good fortune to have known me so long as have Eustoie, Potina, and others, and to have seen me as Aphrodite, as Helen, as Leda, as the benign and lovely figures you know, when all of you were young." She smiled and, glancing covertly at the group of women guests, went on more softly: "But I do not wish to destroy so precious a memory. No," she shook her head. "Others will imitate the goddesses, others will dance. For you see, my friends, such is the tragedy of life that age ever attacks the most beautiful, who are the most tender. 'Tis said that Aphrodite became languid with time, and that in later years there were lines on Helen's brow! So I will not act for you. 'Tis only the unlovely that the years cannot spoil! Yea, my friends, only the heads of the Gorgons, being ever ugly, can show no further hideousness!"

Uproarious laughter convulsed the assemblage. Catherine and Carna, the youngest of the courtesans, fell over each other, giggling. Priscilla and Octavia grunted viciously, whilst Eustoie—mocked with hilarious jeers, cat-calls, and pointed fingers—strangled over the fowl she was swallowing.

## XV

THE feast mounted in bacchanalian mirth and noise. The second course came to an end, but it seemed the supply of food would never cease. There were jellies the color of gold, cheeses, and baskets of fruit voluptuous as amorous mouths—tawny melons from the oases, Omani peaches pink as maidens' cheeks, purple plums from Ravenna, pomegranates, fresh figs, oranges from Ostia, apples from Syria, gourds filled with honey, and bunches of blue grapes from the vineyards of Libya and Ascalon. There were dried raisins, pistachio nuts, shelled almonds, preserved fruits, confections and sherbets, golden, green, rose-colored and purple, of snow. By a signal of her hand Mary commanded the chief of the entertainers.

An acrobat performed on a bar and jumped through hoops. A contortionist, double-jointed, tied himself into a knot. Two wrestlers, their bodies gleaming with oil, engaged with each other; their limbs twisted, their tendons snapped, their muscles bulged under their skin. A number of sword-blades were set upon the stage; from the wings a girl, of perhaps ten, leaped into the midst. The diners held their breath. She jumped and pirouetted among the blades; at each descent of her feet it seemed her body would be cloven. The rapidity of her movements increased; her body became a white blur amid the stationary weapons. Describing a somersault, she turned about, head downward, and danced on her hands. With another leap she landed on her feet without the dangerous circle and ran laughing down the edge of the stage, bowing to the assemblage. A rain of drachmæ clattered like hail about her.

Presently a gust of mischievous laughter pealed through the hall, and a troop of boys, numbering perhaps a hundred, entered with a cyclonic dash. They had vine leaves and grapes in their hair and wore baby-panther skins about their loins. Their faces grinned with impish mischief. Extending their arms with impetuous invitation, they made tumultuous descents toward the guests. With palms retardingly upraised in disdainful denial, they leaped backwards. They jumped

into the air, their brown feet flew under them like leaves in an autumn storm. They gave vent to shrill cries, peals of lascivious laughter. Joining hands, their bodies swaying undulantly, they danced in a circle about the table; they made obscene grimaces and stuck out their tongues at the guests. Their movement increased with irresistible momentum, until, in a frenzied whirl, their lithe brown bodies merged in an indeterminate maze, out of which fugitive teasing faces laughed, glittering eyes flashed, and bewilderingly leaping feet appeared and vanished. Finally, with one leap in the air, the dancers came to a dead stop. Frenziedly tossing their vine wreaths toward the guests, they shriekingly scattered as though pursued by satyrs. From the gardens without came shouts and hoidenish laughter.

Following the rout, the Athenian choir sang Theocritus's love-lament of the jealous Simætha after her incantation to the moon:

"Observe my love, whence it arose, O lady Moon!

"And when he had looked on me the cruel man, having fixed his eyes on the ground, sat upon the couch. And quickly body was warmed by body, and our faces became hotter than with sun-heat, and we were whispering sweetly. And that I may not prate to thee too long, dear Moon, greatest things took place.

"But there came to me to-day the mother of my flute-player, and she told me that in sooth Delphis is in love; but only thus much: That he was pouring forth of unmixed wine to Eros, and at last went hurriedly to the house of his love with wreaths. At other times he was wont to resort to me thrice and four times a day, but now 'tis even twelve days since I have seen him. Has he not then some other delight, and has he not forgotten me?

"Now, indeed, I will compel him by love-charms; and if he should still vex me also, by the Fates I swear he shall knock at the gates of Hades. But fare thee well, and turn thy steeds, dread Lady, toward the sea. And I will bear my trouble, even as I have undertaken. Farewell, bright-complexioned Moon, and farewell, ye other stars, attendants on the chariot of stilly night."

Some of the guests, having become ill, were escorted from the chamber by slaves. Every one talked volubly, each trying to drown the voice of another, until no words were distinguishable. They discussed the scandals of the city, the latest divorces, the most notorious cases in bankruptcy, the races and gladiatorial games, the inefficiency of the governor, the pretensions of the Christian Patriarch, and the astonishing raids of the monks.

They talked of what was the most momentous news of the day—the campaign Theodosius was organizing against Eugenius, the rhetorician, who, on the assassination of Valentinian II by the ambitious Arbogastes, two years before, had been raised to the throne of the Empire of the West.

“What think ye his imperial majesty hath done? Of whom he seeketh counsel in so grave an affair as war?” said Glauco.

“Of his cook,” succinctly commented Aulus. “Perhaps of the keeper of his stables. Ye all know that for several years he hath consulted Ambrose concerning all civil measures—and by this arrogant bishop have his majesty’s ministers and councillors been guided and domineered as well.”

“Tell us—tell us, whose high advice doth he now seek?”

“John of Lycopolis,” answered Glauco.

“John of Lycopolis!” Laughter greeted this declaration.

John of Lycopolis was one of many hermits of the time who had achieved a unique reputation for sanctity. On the summit of a mountain near the city of Lycopolis, in the remote Thebaid, this holy man fifty years before had sought retreat, denying himself all food cooked by fire and all human comforts. He had spent a half century in an isolated cave devoting five days of the week to solitary prayer and meditation. On Saturdays and Sundays he gave audience to thousands of pilgrims who came from all parts of Egypt. All consisted of men, however, for the aged John steadfastly refused to look upon that abominable creature woman, or to permit any women to mingle among the visiting supplicants.

“Yea,” continued Glauco, “the most august Emperor, having silenced the oracles of Delphi and Dodona, seeketh divine instruction from John of Lycopolis! An illiterate Christian hermit to direct the waging of a civil war—this ignorant madman to deliver the oracle that shall govern the Emperor in this supreme affair of state! An embassy recently arrived in the city from Theodosius headed by Eutropius.”

“Eutropius?”

“Theodosius’s favorite eunuch. Already he saileth up the Nile, in royal state, most humbly to intercede with this unwashed John to make known the will of heaven!”

Despite the crisis that threatened the empire, the coming war aroused little enthusiasm. Their personal affairs, the gossip of the city, the coming races and gladiatorial games interested them more. As the heat of wine mounted to their heads, many revealed personal and domestic secrets, some gleefully, and, to their later dismay, boastingly telling of shocking scandals in which they were involved. They told ribald stories concerning their mistresses and wives. They joined in the choruses of the hired singers, drank toasts to Mary, heartily and with gusto unceasingly poured libations to the gods.

While the guests were eating their ices an extraordinary company appeared—youths and maidens in bizarre masquerade, some wearing masks of the heads of birds, tigers, crocodiles, apes, serpents; some clothed in the skins of Libyan lions, tigers, goats, dogs, the plumage of peacocks and ostriches; some representing mammoth moths and butterflies, wings extended, others dragons, monstrous beetles, and sea-dolphins. The troop performed a dance of unparalleled licentiousness in which were represented the amours of forest, jungle, and sea. This charmed the guests. When they had finished, amid the applause, Mary raised her hand, signalling silence. She spoke:

“My friends, my desire is that my farewell shall be worthy of you and of being remembered as marking my departure from your midst. But alas!” she smiled sweetly, “the memory of man is of exceeding brevity! Therefore, ere the hours wax late, and Morpheus or Eros claim you, I wish to give to each of you a token of my regard—what may, for a short while at least, recall my memory despite newer and more engrossing pleasures. To each I give the goblet wherefrom he has drunk this night. Whenever you lift it in libation to the gods I pray you invoke their favor upon me—especially of her of Cyprus, most gracious and lovely of divinities!”

With enthusiastic cries the guests fondled the rare goblets of gold and violet-colored myrrhine glass. Of extraordinary value, the cups were enhanced with gems. Libations were poured, the gods invoked eternally to smile upon their daughter.

“To each of you, as a token of my gratitude for the gifts ye have brought to the shrine of Aphrodite, I give one of my

slave-maidens! Let each select her who hath pleased him most! Perchance, if ye be so minded at any time, ye may present such winsome damsel, with the compliments of Mary, to your wives! Wives are ever deficient in the arts of love and the sweet and versatile play of affection which holdeth a man! I assure you my maidens are sorceresses of pleasure and mistresses of the charms that enthrall the heart! They can teach your dull wives much!"

Hilarious laughter answered her.

"Incomparable one! Certainly she is well remembered who starts domestic squabbings!"

Mary smiled deprecatingly.

"When I go forth I shall leave all behind me. To-morrow morn my slaves, such as remain after your picking, shall be granted their freedom. So select the flower that most pleases you."

With a furtive smile, Mary addressed the courtesans.

"To thee, Eustoie, I give one of my most treasured hand-maidens—one skilled in the arts of the toilet, of dressing the hair, and the factitious substitutes of youth; and to thee, Potina, one unsurpassed in the art of dress. She will teach thee good taste in adornment. May the gods be gracious unto you and preserve your beauty!" Shouts of good-natured derision were hurled at the two women. They colored with rage; but their indignant voices were drowned in the din.

"Implacable Venus! Be merciful to thy priestesses!"

When silence was restored, Mary added:

"To you, Catherine, Priscilla, Carna, Octavia, I give each likewise a maiden skilled in the toilet, in manners, in compounding perfumes and the secrets of love. They will be valuable to you. To thee, Almachus, to whom I am indebted for songs of praise and many hours of torture in listening to thy verses, I give my favorite of the slaves—Nourjean, 'Light of the world,' who is more a peri than a boy. He will teach thee complexity of passion and simplicity of verse. To thee, Ben-Ezra, in addition to the moneys and interest which shall be paid thee ere I depart, I know of no more fitting gift than yon stuffed pig! As my guests have done me more honor this night with their thirst than with their appetite, it remains



uncarved, and I shall have it conveyed to thy house. As thou canst eat it not, being forbidden by thy religion, thou canst preserve it as a tribute to and symbol of thy race. In all creation, methinks, naught compares with the vulgar voracity of the swine in its mire as thy people's greed for usury!" Amid the jeers and insults of the audience, Ben-Ezra bowed with dignity. His face colored, but he made no reply. "To you, Helius, Faustus, Glauco, Pythagoras, and my friend philosophers I give my cellars of wine. As philosophy is the result of madness, the solvent of the senses, the fumes of fancy, and leadeth nowhere but to long arguing and confusion, I trust your days may be full of cheer. Now be merry, my friends! Let there be wine! Drink! Slaves! Renew the gums! Scatter perfumes! Summon the dancers! Strike up the music!"

The banqueters cheered and laughed. Slaves renewed the braziers. Fresh flowers were scattered over the floor. The golden net in the ceiling was agitated. Maidens, bearing urns, sprinkled perfumes over the guests with asperges wands. Now and then a goblet dashed to the floor. One by one the candles on the table guttered out. The atmosphere of the hall was hazy with incense smoke. Rolling billows of vapor, assuming changing colors in the light of the lamps, obscured the faces of the guests. Amid a blaze of torches Mary appeared through the maze, mistress of the revelry, her golden garment and jewels aflame.

Seiggir, creeping close, folded his arms about her waist. He covered her hands with kisses. Mary became faint with nausea.

"Open the casements! The room is stifling! I would have air!" she commanded a slave.

The blinds and lattices were thrown back, and a soft breeze entered, dispelling the fumes of incense. Through one of the windows the tops of plane trees were outlined against a luminous sky. Gazing upward Mary saw the moon. From the alleys in the rear of the palace came the cheers of beggars being fed on the offals from the table. A heavy melancholia, like a cold hand, gripped Mary's heart. Leaning back in Seiggir's arms, shivering, she breathed:

"To-night we make merry here, and the moon shines with-

out. It shines upon the Nile and upon the olden tombs where queens and princesses sleep. And ever we try with wine and music to banish the fears—the fear of life and the fear of death—within our hearts! But it is in vain, Seiggir, it is in vain! A thousand years ago, when pharaohs and princesses sat at their banquets, the moon shone as it shines to-night! Whether they made love or wept, the moon silvered the Nile and lighted the tombs of those who a thousand years before had died, and who were then forgotten! And to-night the moon lights their tombs and stirs the bats—to-night while we in our turn dine. Thus will the moon shine, my Seiggir, a thousand years hence—yea, and while men make fools of themselves with wine, while they endeavor with merriment and music to shut out the shadows of fate and the thought of death, the moonlight will flood our forgotten tombs. Thus the moon once shone upon Helen's face as she looked over the walls of Troy. Thus it shone into Aspasia's garden when she gave loving counsel unto Pericles. Helen's beauty has vanished, she is but a name; we know naught of Aspasia's wisdom nor her grave. Thus the moon shone o'er Nero's feasts, o'er Messalina's couch of love; thus . . . when Cleopatra died . . .” Mary gazed along the table, about which the men's bloated faces appeared like red blurs through a fetid maze. “What fools we are, Seiggir! What fools! What fools! There is no happiness in the world, Seiggir, save the happiness of illusions! The monks are right. We delude our senses with music, we exhilarate our brains with wine. But life is a brief, a terrible thing, a void wherein loves as well as hopes are futile. There is no merriment in our dances. False is the joy of our songs. We muddle our brains and fool ourselves. All enjoyments, all triumphs, all loves pall. Even vengeance fails. Perchance thou and I shall voyage hence, into new seas—but not for long, Seiggir! Not for long! All voyages have but one harbor—the harbor of the grave, Seiggir, the grave—the grave!” Her voice sank to an awed, hushed whisper.

“And what is beyond the grave, Seiggir? These Christians—they alone do not fear death, for they place no value upon mortal things. . . . Are they right, Seiggir, are they right? . . . Have they found some secret we do not know?

Thy people and my people, as all peoples, have their gods—but are the gods there in the darkness? Or will the darkness, as life, mock us? I wonder, Seiggir, and I am afraid! Afraid! We cannot put off our end. Death is the only certain thing in life. Yea, though we no longer follow the olden custom and sit with a mummy at our feast, ever the face of death gazes at us. It gazes to-night from the faces of these who laugh here”—she swept the chamber with a gesture of repulsion—“from the face of Ben-Ezra who will find his usury profitless; from the face of Eustoie, who will find no flattery in the mirror of the eternities. Yea, Seiggir, we may drink and dance and sing and love—thou and I—even as they. But the races of the world pass, human quests, accomplishments, and loves all end—and to what purpose? This we know—we delude ourselves in vain, Seiggir—the vanities, the pleasures of life are futile, futile, empty, and death is as inscrutable as it is certain . . . Yea, and over our banquets and our graves alike the moon shines, unchangingly . . . forever.”

She lay her head back, pale with apprehensive dread, and closed her eyes wearily.

“Thou talkest strangely,” said Seiggir, lifting a goblet of wine to her lips. “I love thee! Life lieth before us! Why speak of death? Sweet Mary, adorable Mary, be of good heart! Drink! Drink!”

Mary took the cup, and, smiling upon it, muttered:

“Yea, what fools!” Then she drank deep, and with mad laughter fiercely flung the cup from her.

Vaguely puzzled, Seiggir reclined by her, his eyes engulfing her with awed admiration and impassioned desire. For a long while Mary sat as one in a trance, starily watching the revelry. Laughing faces about the festive board melted away, and all about, drinking from golden cups, she beheld, as they would be a few years hence, stark, staring skulls. Thus all pleasure ended; thus life concluded. To what purpose? To what end? Her own life had been a travesty of that thing which she desired. Did death hold it? . . . Death alone was certain. And, in the years to come, whatever might betide her, the moon would shine, unchanging, a silvery mockery in the night.

At a signal from the chief of the entertainers, curtains parted at the end of the hall. A troop of Syrian girls, wilder than gazelles, tumultuously swept into the room. Even the voices of the more hilarious were drowned in the tintinnabulation of strings, the wail of flutes, the blare of horns, and the clapping of crotalos. The girls danced turbulently. There were bells on their wrists and ankles. They madly clashed tambourines. Their stomachs were bare. Their feet leaped and pranced. They made wild rushes through the chamber, approached and retreated from the guests who lay on the couches. They waved their arms; their bodies twisted in lascivious and incredible contortions; the muscles of their stomachs undulated voluptuously. They rolled their big eyes with invitation, refusal, swooning ecstasy. They shuddered in a spasm of feigned delight. Flinging their tambourines impetuously to the floor, they stood rigid, their eyes flashing, panting.

With delighted shouts, guests, young and old, seized the wanton creatures and bore them off—some to alcoves behind the tapestries along the walls, others to the gardens.

The garden groves were lighted by torches. Musicians, dressed as satyrs, played on lutes and bagpipes. Troops of corybantes, naked to the waist, went dancing among the trees. In caves built of artificial rocks, bedded with moss, couples sought retreat. From without, over the walls of the gardens, came the uproar of beggars. Singers marched through the streets about the palace chanting the farewell song of Lycidas:

“Fair voyaging befall you,  
Both when the kids are westering,  
And the South wind the coy waves chase  
And when Orion treads the sky above the ocean!”

Far away, but approaching, could be occasionally heard the fanatic outcries of monks on a nightly raid.

Within the banquet hall the excitement became a fever. Unprecedented license prevailed. Octavia, partly disrobing, embraced Almachus. Ben-Ezra, finding no one paid any attention to him, made his departure. Trying to make themselves heard over the clamor, the philosophers argued boisterously concerning the dying discussion of Socrates. Helius spilled wine

constantly; his tunic was drenched. Almachus called angrily for more wine. "This wine is sour as the temper of the Gorgons! Slaves! More wine! I want honey in the wine! By the dog of hell; are the bees of Egypt dead?" Reeling under the table, a number of guests, unable again to rise, lay groaning in their vomit. Occasionally a slave deigned to lift a besotted noble to his place. Nourjean, excited by the frenzy, joined a Greek singer in an abandoned dance, and then arm in arm rolled to the floor, hiding beneath the sheltering foliage of dwarf acacia trees surrounding a pillar. The musicians played as if beside themselves. The lamps burned low; the candles sputtered out. Flower petals, wilted, still rained upon the table. Seiggir drew closer and closer to Mary. His arms passionately enfolded her. His lips devoured her eyes, her ears, her throat. He kissed her gilded, coral-tipped breasts.

"Dost thou love me? Mary! Mary! Divinest among women, wilt thou love me forever? This is a night of nights—by Odin, a fitting farewell to Alexandria! To-morrow night we shall ride the seas! The waves shall be our couch! Mary! Why art thou so cold? 'Tis a night of joy!"

Hugged in his strong, uncouth arms, Mary became feverishly infected by the music, the shouts, the wine, the contagion of the rout; her cheeks flushed; her breath came fast. Surrendering herself, she cuddled with half-terror upon Seiggir's breast, panting, breathing close upon his face.

"Love me, love me, Seiggir! Hold me close! I know not why—I am afraid! My heart is ice!" Looking fearfully about among the revellers, again she seemed to see the faces of skulls; among the dancers the staring eyes of the dead, and through the casement, like a planet's death-lamp, the cold, lucent moon. Over the outcries Mary heard shouted aloud, somewhere afar, the name of Christ. Flinging her arms about Seiggir's neck, she moaned, desperate, shuddering: "Take me, Seiggir, take me!"

Their mouths united.

Two raucous, terrified, almost inhuman cries rent the air. Simultaneously a tremendous uproar swelled from the beggars in the alley, drowning out the revelry in the gardens. His great eyes rolling with terror, his arms waving wildly in des-

perate fright, one of Mary's Nubian porters burst into the banquet hall. A horrible noise came from his gaping, tongueless mouth. The second porter followed.

Affrighted, Mary tore herself from Seiggir's embrace and leaped to her feet. Transfixed, she gazed at the great entrance. Through its portals hurled themselves headlong a troop of slaves, eunuchs, glee-girls, servants from the pantry and kitchen, fleeing in mad consternation. Before she could find voice, Mary heard the heavy, dull impact of battering-rams assaulting the grilled doors of the outer vestibule. Almost immediately followed the thud of falling statues, the smash of broken casements, and the metallic clangor of bronze lamps hurtled to the pavement.

"The soldiers! The soldiers! They have come with the monks! Flee the house!"

Shrieking, wailing, struggling, fighting, trampling one another, negro slaves, eunuchs, glee-girls, and dancers poured into the banquet chamber in a mad race to the door at the farther end leading to the gardens. Some fell head over heels in their flight. But almost immediately they dashed back from the gardens, desperate, beside themselves, followed by frightened, dumfounded guests.

"The house is surrounded! They number a thousand! The monks batter at the garden gates! They would destroy the house!" From the atrium came a tremendous uproar—of stampeding feet, the clash of armor; from the peristyle, almost immediately, the crash and tumult of destruction, the demolishment of statues and braziers, the smashing of doors, the barbarous oaths of soldiers, the war-cry of monks on zealot rampage, the screams of women.

"The soldiers! They have come with the monks!" For a moment Mary was stunned, incredulous. Then her cheeks crimsoned with furious rage; her eyes flashed as waters reflect lightning. "By the gods, the dogs shall suffer for this affront!"

Followed by Seiggir, she swept majestically toward the great stairway. Hardly had she gone ten paces when a troop of stationaries in armor appeared, their metal shields forming a wall at the great entrance. Behind the rigid line of soldiers,

howling, yelling, yelping, jumping, and leaping, appeared an appalling mob—monks in hoods and sheepskins, wild-eyed, their hair dishevelled, utterly frenzied; their following of the rabble—laborers, slaves, negroes, hideous-visaged ruffians from the docks, and drunken sailors who had joined the rioters from curiosity. With them came hordes of beggars who had been fed from Mary's table, intoxicated with the lust of destruction and the prospect of spoils. The mob was armed with maces, batons studded with nails, bludgeons, and staves. They made a deafening clamor.

"Woe to the woman of Babylon! Rejoice over her, thou heaven! Let her be made desolate! Let her lovers lament over her burning! Give unto her the cup of wine of the fierceness of God's wrath! Cesspool of Alexandria!"

"Jezebel!"

Panic seized the banqueters. Distracted, distraught, men and women frantically rushed hither and thither, stampeded into the gardens, and frantically climbed the high casements, seeking means of escape. The spectacle of the monks and their following was appalling. Still sodden in the stupor of wine, banqueters cowered on their couches. Octavia, Potina, and several of the courtesans fled into alcoves behind the tapestries. Nourjean and the Greek boy singer, terrified, cowered back under the dwarf acacia. Bereft of their wits, Mary's eunuchs, a dozen fat, pig-eyed creatures, rushed hysterically about, wailing. Almachus, amid the excitement, blinking his eyes stupidly, sottishly demanded honeyed wine.

"By Odin, I will have an explanation for this indignity!" Drawing his sword, Seiggir leaped forward. As he reached the bottom of the steps, the captain of the guards, in gold-ornamented helmet and cuirass, descended, holding aloft in his left hand a ring curiously wrought.

At the sight of it an awed, almost sobbing, sigh of terror went up.

"The signet ring of the Emperor!"

Drunk as he was, Caius Marcellus pulled himself together and crept forward, peering over the shoulders of those before him. Recognizing the awesome seal, his heart went to jelly—it was the ring given to those authorized to carry out his

decrees by the august Emperor of Byzantium. He took to his heels and, as fast as his weight allowed, escaped to the gardens, where he hid in a cave. The dancers and slave-women threw themselves prostrate, sobbing hysterically.

"The signet ring of the Emperor! Woe! Woe! The ring of the most august of the Cæsars!"

With a chagrined oath Seiggir lowered his sword.

Gently pushing Seiggir aside, Mary confronted the captain. Her face was very white, but serene. She spoke with a quiet though stern and imperious dignity.

"Thou hast invaded my house. Thou hast committed violence. Thou hast brought with thee a mob of low monks and ruffians. For what cause? By what authority? Why am I and my guests affronted?"

The captain, a great hulk of a man, disconcerted by Mary's tranquil self-possession, stammered:

"'Tis not my will, madam, nor the will of his excellency, the governor——"

He lifted the signet ring, but Mary tossed her hand at it with impatience and cut him short.

"I understand this bauble of gold—or is it brass?—cometh from the superstition-ridden ass of Byzantium. What hath that to do with thy breaking into my house, destroying my statues, and bringing with thee this offensive rabble? I ask thee for what cause hast thou entered my house."

The withering contempt of Mary's eyes, as her upward gaze swept the mob behind the soldiers, aggravated their fury to a violent outburst. Even beggars joined the monks in the wild chorus of insults.

"I tell thee, madam," the captain explained apologetically, "this is not the doing of his excellency, the governor. He does not like this work any more than I. I am a plain soldier, madam, but when orders are given I must obey."

Mary raised her eyebrows with supercilious scorn, and said impatiently:

"Save thy excuses—they do not interest me. Answer what I have asked of thee."

Excited and angered, Seiggir began to protest, but Mary placed a restraining hand on his arm. She turned to the



captain with uplifted haughty gaze. Raising his sword to silence the rabble, the captain announced in a loud voice:

"A rescript hath been received from Theodosius, august Emperor of the East, approving of a plan submitted by his holiness, Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, in which the said Theophilus suggesteth certain proceedings against existing corruptions, the suppression of haunts of ill-repute, the arrest and imprisonment of such women as give scandal in the city, and such matters as relate otherwise than our present business. By the divine authority of the Emperor, Theophilus is accorded such armed assistance as may insure the carrying out of these plans. Theophilus hath demanded the arrest of courtesans and the closing of their houses, and in this work his excellency, the governor, is constrained to coöperate, and we, the soldiers, obey. Lest there should be bloody resistance, his holiness hath ordered that we show, as evidence of his imperial authority, the signet ring which was sent with the rescript."

Holding up the ring, the captain cried aloud:

"We have here a script calling for the arrest of Mary, known as a courtesan in Alexandria, and of her slaves, women dancers, glee-girls, and other inmates of her house, which, so the warrant recites, hath long been a source of moral pestilence and contagion and scandal in the city." Addressing her directly, "Mary, thou art charged with sorcery, with dealing in enchantments, with the corruption of the youth of the city, and of divers wickedness. Thou art charged with the death of Cyprian, son of Philamon the Christian."

Whilst he spoke he signalled the soldiers. Moving down the steps in two flanks, they surrounded Mary, forming a circle. A second detachment, following the captain's orders, moved stolidly through the banquet hall, seizing, right and left, the slaves, girl dancers, Greek chorus boys, and eunuchs. They clamped handcuffs on their wrists and gyves about their ankles. They herded the captives together like sheep.

With a maniac outcry, a fearsome cataract of frantic humanity burst through the door after the soldiers, and, seething down the steps, engulfed the banquet chamber. Entering from the street, bands of monks, half naked, their bodies

eaten with ulcers, wearing only sheepskins, bore into the house with the fury of a whirlwind, howling a war chorus.

"Down with the woman in scarlet! Sewer of the world! Mistress of abominations! Deliver her up!"

With difficulty, and only by now and then charging their spears, did the cordon of guards about Mary succeed in keeping back the murderous fanatics of the desert. Surrounding the soldiers, they brandished weapons, shook their fists, clawed the air with their talon hands, and spat over the shoulders of the guards at her. Their faces contorted hideously. Their inflamed eyes glowed like red coals. Standing calmly within the circle of soldiers, her robe of gold drooping in regal splendor about her, her jewels gleaming in the light of the leaping torches, Mary looked like some Olympian divinity viewing with contemptuous disgust an orgy of swine. Shrugging her shoulders with aversion, she muttered:

"Gods of Egypt, that the earth should have spewed forth such loathly vermin!"

Ransacking the hall, the soldiers constantly added to their group of captives. They scoured the chamber, searching hidden recesses, surprising chief citizens cringing in the alcoves. Recognizing the men, they bade them don their robes and begone; the girls they roughly haled forth, securing them in chains. Mary's Greek chorus boys they treated with soldiers' brutal contempt for such effeminate creatures; they were thrown roughly to the floor, kicked and buffeted. They sobbed like girls, whose voice and manner they affected. Eager to finish their mission, the soldiers tore down curtains, overturned porcelain urns, thrust their spears under couches and tables. Now and then an awful agonized cry answered the thrust of a spear. Additional bands had gone grimly into the gardens and dispersed through the wings of the house.

"I tell thee, this is an outrage! Can nothing be done?" Seiggir protested fiercely with the captain. He offered him money. He would give him a fortune. Could not word be sent to the governor? The captain grimly shook his head.

"The governor is as powerless as I. The warrant calls for the arrest of this noble lady, and as such must be obeyed. Only his holiness, Theophilus, or perchance his representative,

the leader of these monks, can rescind what we have been ordered to do."

"But this woman is going with me to-morrow! We are leaving Alexandria! By Odin, thou shalt not take her with thee! I defy thee! I defy the governor! I defy this accursed Patriarch! Where is his representative? By the hammer of Thor, I will——"

"Excellency, pardon the presumption of a soldier," the captain spoke kindly. "I have as little sympathy with the schemes of this Christian bishop as thou. It seemeth the Emperor—may he live forever!—hath not been permitted to forget the part which this lady took in inciting the massacre against the Christians at the Serapium. His majesty goeth forth to engage in conflict with the usurper of Rome, Eugenius, and 'tis said, to win the favor of heaven, he hath granted favors and privileges to, and acceded to the requests of, the bishops of the empire that they may pray for victory in his enterprise. He hath fully acceded to the petition of his holiness, Theophilus, in granting him power to carry on his crusade against the vices of Alexandria. Resist us if thou wilt, noble lord, but if I may again presume to offer a suggestion, methinks thou canst be of more service to thy friend, this noble lady, if thou permit the law to take its course and see she is defended in the Tribune on the morrow, when witnesses will appear against her."

Mary seemed listlessly surprised.

"Witnesses?" she asked.

"'Tis said his holiness, the Patriarch, hath scourged Alexandria for witnesses and hath a horde," the captain answered. "It seemeth he hath been implacably bitter in his strictures against thee and hath sworn thy undoing. I assure thee, lady, I but obey orders, and deplore this violence."

Seiggir swore.

"Doth the Patriarch demand money? I will give him gold up to his neck. I will build him a church. Go to him. Tell him to name his price. This woman goeth with me to voyage. If he so will, she will remain away from Alexandria. To Hades with these Christian dogs! I will see this Patriarch. He shall have a galley of spoils."

The captain calmly shook his head. Mary, with a touch of impatience, plucked at Seiggir's arm.

"Cease thy wild talk, my friend," she said softly. "Thou canst do naught with these madmen. The gods only know what lies Theophilus hath conveyed to the Emperor concerning me. For long he and that caitiff Philamon have conspired for my undoing! Theophilus hath the weapon of Cæsar. What canst thou do, my friend?"

Ignoring her words, Seiggir protested vehemently, demanding that word be sent immediately to the Patriarch. He would give him gold for crosses, build a street of churches. Her eyes blazing with sudden anger, Mary drew herself up with pride.

"Silence! Thou art a man of the seas! Insult me not! Thinkest thou"—her voice thrilled with indignation—"I would cowardly flee from Alexandria now, even if such meant freedom? Forsooth, though I am a woman, I can be as brave as these dogs are cowardly and vile! Thinkest thou I would compromise with *polloi* so low? Hast thou no respect for me? Thinkest thou I should cringe before that contemptible liar, Theophilus? I?—I? Or that I should ask for mercy of any of his dogs?"

The monks plunged into an increasing saturnalia of destruction. They upset the banquet table. With exultant yells they hurled costly vessels of silver, gold, and porcelain into the air. Priceless goblets of Alexandrian and myrrhine glass they trampled under their heels. They overturned the massive lampadaries, scattering the lights. They beat incense braziers against fluted columns speckled like the skin of snakes. With bludgeons they demolished the enthralling Venus rising in the centre of the fountains. The suspended Byzantine lamps were hurtled, with deafening crashes, to the floor. With staves they smashed the wondrous windows of multi-colored glass. They tore the tapestries of Tyrian purple and gold to shreds. They defiled the pictures on the walls. Believing every object in the house inhabited by demons, they overthrew marble statues from their pedestals and with bars of iron mutilated figures as costly as they were exquisite. Only when she saw the destruction of all these

priceless objects, these things of beauty, did a mist swim into Mary's eyes.

"The filthy swine!" she muttered, clenching her hands and trying to repress the sobs that rose; "verily they are the vomit of the earth, the dung of stables!"

Lifting his sword, the captain shouted:

"Our warrant calleth for the arrest of Mary, known as a courtesan in Alexandria, and all such women as are inmates of her house—dancers, glee-girls, eunuchs, and slaves. All others are free to go hence. Go, therefore, and interfere not with the carrying out of the warrant." He called to the soldiers:

"Soldiers! Hasten! Bring hither the inmates, glee-girls, dancers, and women! The hour groweth late. We have other work to accomplish to-night. Bring hither the prisoners and clear the house!"

Soldiers had gone into the bedchambers, the cellars, and the gardens.

Struggling impotently or meekly weeping, the prisoners were brought from the various parts of the palace and gardens. Some of the girls viciously bit at their captors' wrists and scratched and snapped at them. Others fainted and were supported by soldiers. As the girls were marshalled through the chamber, their pink bodies were pawed and scratched by the curious and dirty rioters. Despite the efforts of the guards to protect them, some were stunned by blows from the monks. They were assembled in a body, within a circle of guards, before the captain and near to Mary. There the timid creatures gave way to utter panic, throwing themselves upon the marble floor, wringing their hands, begging for mercy. Gazing upon them, Mary spoke gently, half reproachfully:

"Dry your tears; be brave! Have ye no pride of heart?"

Taking advantage of the riot, scores of outlaws and thieves had sneaked into the palace, stealing whatever they could lay their hands upon—vases, plates, cups of myrrhine glass and gold, fabrics, and jewels. Creeping amid the crush of monks and their followers, they snatched the necklaces from the dancers and, rendering the glee-girls unconscious with swift blows, tore the rings from their fingers and the gold hoops

from their ears, arms, and ankles. A half dozen ruffians had discovered Nourjean crouching behind an urn. They struck the painted boy on his mouth. He cowered back, whimpering. Pinching and twisting his limbs with vulgar delight, they stripped him of his rich clothes, took the necklaces and bracelets with which he was bedecked, and buffeted and spat upon his delicate body. They left him unconscious and bleeding. In the midst of the *mêlée* Mary saw horrid creatures prowling about, darting under the fallen tables, seeking fragments of food, and pouncing upon objects of value. They crept about with the hesitating alarm and quick cunning of rats. Mary saw dozens making away with battered plates of gold, cups, and other treasured objects concealed in their garments. The hideousness of the spectacle, the utter vulgarity and sordidness of it, turned her sick. Eager to have it all over, Mary stepped over the prostrate girls on the floor and approached the captain.

"Make haste and do your work. What now is thy will with me?"

Her face was impassive.

The captain stammered:

"Noble lady, thou art to be led forth as the others."

On his arm Mary saw dangling a pair of manacles.

For a moment she winced. Then, summoning her courage, with the indomitable spirit that marked her as great among women, she bravely outstretched both her jewelled arms toward the captain.

Seiggir, with a sobbing oath, intervened.

"Lose not thy head, my friend," said Mary, with gentle reproof. "Thou hast heard the captain explain he is powerless. Against the will of the Emperor what canst thou do? When these dogs appear with lies perchance thou canst be of help to me, though I doubt it! This I charge thee: As thou believest in thy gods, as thou art a man, as thou desirest my respect, as thou lovest me, make no craven overtures to Theophilus. If I am undone, let me meet defeat honorably. Submit me to no shameful humiliation. Farewell, Seiggir. The Christians triumph—so be it! The shadows . . . ah, the shadows . . . and the fear in my heart—I understand

them now." Her voice fell to a half sob. "Yea, the Christians triumph. Say farewell to all the joyous sacrifices, to the altars of green turf, garlanded, for the milk-white lamb; say farewell to the cheerful songs and dances at the coming of the spring, to the festivals of cheer beneath the branching trees! The monstrous idolatry of death prevails, and all is over! Say farewell to Mary, say farewell to love, say farewell to beauty, say farewell to all that maketh fair the world in Alexandria. Go, and the gods be with thee! Farewell, my friend."

Turning to the captain, Mary brought her white wrists together as one who fearlessly summons some inexorable fate.

"Do thy work! Be done with it!"

As he gazed upon Mary's calm, courageous beauty, her face serene as a star, her fearless eyes cold as steel with a resigned disdain, the captain turned his head aside and snapped the ugly instruments on Mary's wrists.

"Lead!" said Mary. "I will follow."

The soldiers formed two serried lines. Between them, following the captain, Mary moved toward the doorway, her chained hands hanging inert before her, her head proudly upraised, her fearless, beautiful eyes gazing through and beyond as if not seeing the ugly mob on either side of her. She did not seem even to hear their exasperated insults. There was something inspiring, splendid, in the frozen, majestic dignity, the unutterable, proud contempt with which she ignored her persecutors. She moved with such leisure as though she were going to some banquet of pleasure. Seiggir, glowering at the monks, strode after her. There followed in procession the other prisoners—Mary's singers, slaves, and glee-girls, cowering with fear, whining and sobbing.

With a wild onrush, the monks, turning from their work of destruction in the chamber, bore down on the soldiers. Breaking by the sheer impetus of their assault through the armed file, they furiously attacked the girls. Lifting their staves, they beat the helpless creatures, tore at their arms and breasts with their finger-nails, and spat into their faces.

The captain shouted. A conflict ensued between monks and soldiers.

"Down with the woman of Babylon! She that drank of the blood of the martyrs—let her blood be spilled!"

"She hath made war with the chosen! The chosen shall overcome her!"

"Remember the Serapium! Mighty is the arm of the Lord! She that wielded the whip upon the blessed Luke, her father, shall feel the strength of His arm! Scourge her soft flesh!"

"Leave her naked and bare! Discover her wickedness! Laugh her to derision!"

"Double unto her according to her works! She that delivered the faithful up to torture, tear her limb from limb!"

"She that pressed the crown of martyrdom upon the saints of the Serapium weareth the crown of her fornications. Strip her of her gauds! Take away her fair jewels! Crown her with shame! Desolation and confusion be upon her!"

Fighting about Mary, the monks clawed at her golden mantle, trampling upon the magnificent train. A maniac seized a rope of pearls about her neck and, tugging at it, tore the chain. The gems scattered over the floor. They buffeted her with their fists, struck at her with their staves, and spat upon her. One, clutching at her diadem, tripped and was trampled by his brethren. In the swirl of the swaying mass Mary was dragged and pushed along. The touch of the despised monks, the indignity of it, aroused in a flash the tigerish ferocity of Mary's nature. A spasm of rage convulsed her face; her eyes blazed with blasting indignation; her breath hissed between her teeth. Her body seemed literally to tower in stature. Intimidated by the awesome wrath flaring like lightning from her eyes, the monks suddenly fell back—back for a moment. The soldiers, quick to act, intervened between Mary and the cenobites.

For sheer outraged passion, Mary could hardly draw breath.

"*Oh, the swine!*" she snarled. "*Vomit of dogs! Spew of the gutters!*"

At that moment Mary saw Seiggir drive his sword into the breast of a monk. Others had fallen before him. Before he could withdraw the weapon a sudden lull fell upon the assemblage.

In the subsidence of the uproar, and from the gardens



without, Mary heard the solemn intoning of an approaching voice, deep, sepulchral, terrible:

*"God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day."*

The clamor of the mob died utterly away. A dead hush fell upon the banquet chamber. All heads turned toward the doorway. The captain of the guards waited expectantly.

*"If He turn not, He will whet his sword; He hath bent His bow, and made it ready."*

*"He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; He ordaineth His arrows against the persecutors."*

Recognizing the voice—though heard years before—Mary momentarily recoiled, then her face relaxed into a grim, patient scorn. Gathering her golden train close about her with one of her manacled hands, she waited, her body rigidly erect, her head raised. The folds of her robe quivered livingly. The red spots of wrath on her cheeks paled; almost imperceptibly her lip curled.

In the yawning aperture of the great door, on the topmost step, above the heads of the soldiers, above the monks and mob, his eyes aflame, his lips inflexibly set, appeared Niobides the monk. The two gazed full and unflinchingly upon one another—Mary, the courtesan; Niobides, the persecuting priest. Mary never flinched; save for a slight uplifting of her eyebrows, her face was imperturbable in its scathingly lofty, almost indifferent disdain. His left hand gloatingly, accusingly, condemningly pointed toward her, the monk in his right hand—and in black relief against the ashen moonlight flooding the court without—triumphantly flaunted aloft the invincible, but too often sacrileged, Cross.

## XVI

MARY was sentenced to death. All the power Theophilus could bring to bear was exerted in the trial against her. Scores of witnesses appeared; some of her own household, promised freedom and rewards, testified against her. According to apparently irrefutable evidence, she was found to be guilty of monstrous sorceries, many witnesses swearing that, against their will, Mary had aroused in them unholy passions, obsessing their thoughts night and day, and that she had driven them to incredible follies, even to the disposition of their slaves and estates in order that they might enrich her. A half-dozen Christians, noted for truth and piety, swore by the bones of the saints and the holy apostles that when Mary walked the street she often emanated heat to such a degree that trees and flowers wilted as she passed. That Mary could alter her countenance, her stature, and the color of her eyes had long been notorious in Alexandria; men came forward and gave convincing testimony to this effect. The majority of the witnesses Mary had never seen.

Philamon appeared and told how Mary, by diabolic arts, had bewitched his son Cyprian, so firing his brain with folly that he persistently scoffed salvation by the Cross. Knowing that as a Christian father he was concerned in saving the soul of his son, this woman of infamy, this consort of Satan, had caused his son's death, deliberately and with full intent, in order that Cyprian might die in his sins and thus bring sorrow on the gray head of his sire. One Lucius Fabulinus, a dissolute gamester who had been at Mary's house the night of Cyprian's death, and who had of late enjoyed loans from Philamon, testified that Mary, enraged at Cyprian because he repulsed her unseemly ardors, had set her panther upon the youth, not desisting in goading the animal until the unhappy boy was dead. Philamon rent his garments and groaned: "My beautiful son is in hell! For what have I spent my days? For what have I labored? For what have mine hairs grown gray? My son is in hell! My beautiful son is among the fiends! Justice unto her who hath been an abomination in the city and who brought about the ruin of my son!"

The Dicasterium overflowed with spectators. A turbulent clamor arose after each witness.

"She hath destroyed souls as she hath slain bodies!"

"To the prison! To the menageries!"

"Let her be crucified!"

Niobides and his monks swept through the justice-hall. In the eyes of the faithful the inspiration of heaven filled him. He spoke long, in resonant ringing tones. In Mary was incarnate the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse, who sat upon the scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, and having ten horns.

"Upon her forehead is a name written—'Mystery, Babylon the great, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth!'"

Had she not given herself to pride and unrighteousness, and the persecution of the Church? Had she not drunk of the blood of the martyrs at the Serapium? Therefore let the words of the prophet be fulfilled: let her in one day know death, and mourning, and famine; in one hour let her judgment come upon her; let her be made desolate!

Niobides's disciples, who had participated in the raid upon her house, gave remarkable testimony revealing the terrifying extent of her traffickings with evil. So intimate was her intercourse with the fiends that all the objects in her house had become inhabited by demons, and when the raiding monks, fortified with holy exorcisms, demolished curtains, pictures, and statues, the foul ones had cried aloud in their rage.

Theophilus was represented by his secretary, his most trusted archdeacon. In punishment for her crimes—her life of notorious scandal, her persecution of the Christians at the Serapium, her sorceries, the death of Cyprian, son of Philamon, beloved in the true fold, and for all divers wickedness amply proved by reliable witnesses—he demanded that Mary be flogged with leather thongs terminated with balls of lead and that, in lieu of the execution given honorable persons, she perish as the meanest criminals, most odiously; that her body be sewed in a sack with a cock, a viper, and a monkey, and be thrown to the wild swine. Such was the desire of his holiness, Theophilus, a shepherd trusted with the care of his earthly

flock. And in his work of ridding Alexandria of uncleanness, in exterminating this courtesan, this bride of anti-Christ, Theophilus had the sanction of his imperial majesty the Emperor.

A clamorous chorus of monks arose :

“Double unto her according to her works! The cup she hath filled, fill to her double! How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her. Strong is the Lord God who judgeth her!”

To the charges against her Mary refused to make answer. “All men present, be they not fools or knaves, know whether these things are truths or lies,” was all she said.

Seiggir, despite her admonition, had sought, with promises of enormous gifts, to influence the Patriarch; he had employed every avenue of approach, every argument, every inducement; but Theophilus was obdurate. Having at last secured the imperial sanction which enabled him to remove an enemy so powerful and pernicious, as well as to punish one so notoriously defiant and insolent in her contempt of the Church, Theophilus heartily and malignantly laughed at the suggestion of relenting.\* Seiggir was warned, by the deacon who acted as intermediary, and to whom for religious purposes he gave a bag of gold staters, that any action he might take to frustrate the course of justice and the will of Theophilus, even any defence or assistance he might make in a case so notorious, and in which the highest authorities of the Church upon earth were intimately concerned, would be reported to the court of Byzantium.

Realizing the grave jeopardy of antagonizing hierarchs enjoying the confidence of Theodosius, and the menace of the Emperor's disfavor, especially to one of his dubious calling; assured of the helplessness of Mary's cause; heartsick and desperate, knowing not what to do, Seiggir drank himself into

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\* Recounting the experience of three monks from the desert who for a while had been associated with the Patriarch Theophilus, Socrates Scholasticus, the church historian of that period, wrote (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book VI, ch. 7): “When, however, in process of time, they observed the bishop to be devoted to gain and greedily intent upon the acquisition of wealth, believing this example injurious to their own souls, they refused to remain with him any longer . . . Theophilus was of a hasty and malignant temperament.”

sodden insensibility in an inn, whereupon his men took him aboard ship and, on the day of Mary's trial, set sail for far seas.

It also happened that Caius Marcellus found it expedient to visit his estates in Syria. Of all who had been vehement in their protestations of love and friendship, none appeared to support or defend Mary, by word or deed, in the Hall of Judgment.

Exposed to malice, slanders, perjuries, to calumnies as endless as they were preposterous, arraigned before a judge whose verdict had already been irrevocably determined by a Church machine operating under the imperial will, Mary stood undefended and alone.

The verdict of the judge was according to the demands of the Patriarch. Mary was condemned to prison to await a shameful and dishonorable execution on the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Serapium. As she was being led away venomous-faced women, old hags who hated her for her youth and beauty, and barren and embittered wives, who hated her for having known love, viciously clawed at her garments. Monks spat at her. The exultant uproar was deafening, demoniac.

"Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her; Babylon is fallen, is fallen! Come out of her, oh people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, that ye receive not of her plagues! Her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities!"

Guarded by two soldiers, Mary, her robe drawn close about her as though she feared contamination, was led across the Dicasterium, stoically calm, gazing neither to the right nor the left.

From the dwelling in which he lived, in pompous poverty, in a dirty side street, the Patriarch Theophilus, ruler of Christianity's most powerful see, went in solemn state to the Cæsareum, there to celebrate with thanksgiving the triumph of righteousness and the imperial support given to the Church in its crusades upon the earth. On the steps of the Cæsareum

were gathered nigh to ten thousand Christians, among them bands of monks frenziedly waving palm branches.

"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen!" chanted the archbishop.

Like the winds of the desert, the response arose:

"Alleluia! Alleluia!"

"Salvation and glory and honor and power unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments; for He hath judged the bride of the beast which did corrupt the earth, and hath avenged the blood of His martyrs at her hand!"

The multitude shouted and sang.

"Alleluia! Alleluia!"

"Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great."

"Alleluia, for the Lord God reigneth omnipotent."

The Patriarch's mitre reflected a nimbus of light. His beard was magnificent. His vestments were resplendent. In one hand he carried his great crozier—the humble shepherd-crook of the Man of Galilee become, jewel-emblazoned, the mightiest sceptre in the world.

With slow, measured tread Theophilus ascended the steps of the temple wherein, in place of the old gods, loomed a titan statue of Christ. Acolytes, swinging censers, preceded him. Presbyters, deacons, archdeacons, priests, monks followed, and after them poured thousands, singing:

"Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he shall smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Alleluia! Alleluia!"

They sang in praise of his triumphant holiness, Theophilus—not of Jesus Christ.

Mary lay in prison. Her cell was in an underground dungeon. It reeked with the filth of years; the floors were slippery with mucous fungi; the walls oozed slime. It was utterly dark. The foulness of the air became a presence. It gripped her, stifled her, puffed its rancid breath into her nostrils. Days and months lost their identity; time was a black night; conscious existence a taut, prolonged, unrelieved

agony. Her golden robe rotted from her. To her feet were fastened chains attached to a fifteen-pound weight. The prisoners who joined her from time to time were the vilest—loathsome harpies and degenerates, creatures no longer human, outcasts, criminals, murderers, thieves, drug maniacs, the scum and sewerage of human society. These low things tormented Mary out of an instinctive malice. Her brain was engulfed in a delirium; she seemed to live in a nightmare—a phantom world in which all things were felt and nothing seen; in which unnamable unrealities merged into dread, defiling reality; in which realities sometimes merged in their odious suggestion into even more awful, unimaginable horrors. There was no means of death.

Mary's property, such as was not destroyed by the monks or stolen by thieves, was confiscated by creditors, who had even stripped her of the jewels with which she had been adorned the night of her arrest. In a day—even as in a moment's space an earthquake may efface the splendor of a great city—Mary's fortune departed from her; the glory of her fame was blotted out in disgrace; undone, all who had known her repudiated her. If she was spoken of, or regretted, it was but secretly. Long before a year had passed Mary was virtually forgotten in Alexandria; songs in her honor ceased to be sung in the streets; at the banquet tables Mary was no longer a subject of discussion; illustrious men no more boasted of having loved her. Her name was but seldom mentioned even in obscene jest. Women utterly ceased to envy her.

Following Mary's trial and condemnation, for a period of months, a persistent campaign had been carried on by Theophilus and his monks against all traffic of pleasure. Raids were made upon houses of ill-repute, noted courtesans were haled into the tribunal, and the women of scarlet were harried and driven from the city. Some of the wealthiest courtesans escaped to Antioch and Naples. A great number—among them Catherine, Eustoie, and others not lacking in shrewdness—publicly espoused Christianity, and on days of worship made a spectacular show of piety. The repentance of such noted sinners edified and delighted the Christians, and the con-

verts were accorded much honor. They gave liberally to the churches, enjoyed the favor of the priests, and pursued lives so circumspect that, years later, after they were dead, some were canonized as saints.

Mary escaped from prison by seducing her gaoler. When Niobides, inspired by the ostentatious charity of the triumphant Church, went in solemn procession to Mary's cell to carry the gospel of repentance the day before her execution, he found it empty. Filled with dismay, he hastily made the sign of the Cross, knowing thus for a verity that Mary was but a demon in human guise, and, in the manner of demons, had vanished through the air. This rumor spread among the Christians of Alexandria.

The sailors' quarter lay east of the main esplanade, nigh to the sea. Amid tumble-down buildings used as warehouses and lodgings were vile haunts of infamy and abominable inns. These were frequented by seafaring men, from Scandinavia to Thracia, from Britain to India, who sought surcease from the monotony of living in beer and wine. They drank copiously from great cow-horns. They gambled, caroused, fought, robbed one another. Foreign tongues joined boisterously in song. Murders were not infrequent. The air reeked with smoke, the odor of frying fish, onions, and stale beer. Mangy dogs and cats slunk about in the shadows. Here, for a period of several years, a mysterious woman, of singular beauty, enjoyed—if one might accept the opinion of less-favored outcasts—a unique if sordid fame. In haunts most frequented by foreign sailors, slaves, blacks, and laborers from the Nile, who sat eating cakes of sesame and lentils, and drinking beer, she danced to the clapping of crotalos or tambourines, or enacted amazing pantomimes representing the *liaisons* of Leda, Phædra, and Pasiphæ. Her performances were greeted with uproarious applause. Oboli rattled upon the floor. Pewter mugs or cow-horns were pressed upon her, and often she drank until her cheeks flushed and her dead-weary eyes, like nigh-extinguished cinders fanned to smoulder, glowed with a dull, feverish exhilaration. But within her, always, this woman's heart was heavy.



The pallor of her face the woman concealed with stains; her lips, her cheeks, her ears, her eyelids were heavily painted. Age, in a sense, had not touched her; rather did she seem to have gone through a furnace of intolerable fire. Base as was her life, she seemed to have endured some singular spiritualization; it was as though vice itself had burned and purged her. Emaciated and wan, this woman was beautiful in an eerily haunting way; none who saw could ever forget her. Hers was the face of Aphrodite wasted with famine or fever. Her body was as a garden of wilted flowers; her voice a memory of music heard on the first night of love; her eyes were strange sea caverns, wherefrom ghosts peered, wide-eyed, with mouths agape, with mingled fear and baffled longing upon the world. Her hands were pleasant dreams. Unlike the women of these places, by them she was hated; for men coveted and fought over her. About herself this woman never spoke; her garments and tawdry fineries she wore with uncommon grace. The rumor went that she had been a great lady, and was a Greek. Now and then a slave or laborer would stare hard at her, finding in her a resemblance to some one seen before or known, and tried to place the vague identity, but although she suffered to be cursed and caressed, and was called crude endearments in every tongue, none knew her name.

That she could possibly sink so low and consort with men so vulgar Mary would never have believed possible in those days when she had been hailed as "the lily of Bruchheim," "the star of the Alexandrian sky." Of the brevity and insecurity of such fame as had been hers, of the utter fickleness of all men's promises, and of the treachery and falseness of lovers Mary bitterly learned in this, the ignominious depth of her misfortune.

Upon escaping from prison Mary had secretly gone to ask for assistance from men she believed she could trust. She realized she could not publicly appear in the city—the Christians were triumphant, and Christianity to Mary—in one of its primary aspects—represented an organized unrelenting conspiracy directed toward the oppression and persecution of her sex. The majority of those from whom she sought help and

who had once been vehement in their devotion refused her; a few, making it plain that even kindness was dangerously compromising, gave her meagre charity, advising that she leave the city at once and go to some foreign part; the greater number who had once sought her, now fearing to see her, closed their doors. Humiliated and crushed, Mary hid herself in one of the darkest and most obscure quarters near the market of Rhacotis, where, without associates and friends, sinking by degrees, she haunted districts unfrequented by any who might know her. She often thought of fleeing to some foreign city and trying to retrieve her fortune, but she always lacked either the ambition or the money; despair gripped her in its deadly inertia. Even as she had been eminent in Alexandria, so in this dark underworld, this antipodal pole of existence, she had now a sinister, if anonymous, fame. Sailors, having heard of this strange woman from their fellows in Crete, Cadiz, Crimea, and remoter ports, arriving at Alexandria, sought her out. Meeting them in the inns, where they drank to excess, Mary found them generous. Many arriving at port, had filled purses, and whenever she could Mary made off with these. Although she had brief periods of sordid prosperity, what money she made she prodigally dissipated. In her own misery, a strange new pity—an understanding of, and response to, human woe—rose like sweet dew in her heart; she beheld, intimately, phases of life hitherto unknown to her, and read into the darkest pages of human existence. She lived among the most unhappy of the suffering poor. In the dismal dwellings of those dark slums in which she lived Mary now went on singular missions, caring for women in childbirth and ministering at the bed of death; with an anguished ache at her heart, she nursed ill infants on her bosom and soothed the fevered brows of children; of what she earned she gave much away to those who, in sooth, were even less fortunate than she.

Often Mary went for days without food, being unable to purchase even lotus roots or beans. She was not infrequently without shelter. Her life, as is the life of all such, was one of contrasting vicissitudes. She often wandered the unlighted streets, hungry, weary unto exhaustion, her throat burning with fever and thirst, her head aching insupportably, the soles

of her sandals worn to the pavement. But through all her experiences and degradations—a thing that drove her onward, that spurred her feet on her nightly quests, that made her cling to life and long for, yet dread, death—Mary was consumed, as of old, but more terribly now, by a haunting desire and a crushing loneliness—a desire and a loneliness no kisses could satiate nor embraces assuage.

Whether in the streets or noisy inns, Mary felt utterly outcast, alien to humankind, a pariah of the world, as alone, as desolate as if she had her being on a dead star. Her isolation was terrible.

Relentlessly the legend that she was a vampire, wherever she went, sinisterly developed about Mary. Feared and loathed, she was driven from haunt to haunt in the labyrinthine Subura. Desperate, utterly abandoned and reckless, even the drab rags and tatters of women of the lowest dives came to despise and abhor, while they envied, yet stood in awe of, her. Mary sought oblivion in the cheap wines of the inns, and then a wild, ghastly mirth possessed her, or she lay inhaling the pungently resinous fumes of hemp, conjuring impossible phantoms of a departed happiness. She hovered for days in a dim crimson somnambulism populated by phantoms, grotesque, of exaggerated size. The reactions were violent, maddening; in a reeling confusion and chaos of thought she suffered excruciating agonies.

Often, at late hours of the night, Mary fled from the vicious haunts across the deserted jetty to the Pharos island, where, for hours, she would sit upon the rocks, the sea booming at her feet. She would gaze with fascinated longing into the heaving depths and creep desiringly to the very verge of the cliffs. But ever, at the last moment, she cringed away. Mary feared life, but, more than life, she feared death.

As a ghost haunting its wonted walks and tormenting itself with irrevocable memories, heavily veiled in a scarlet cyclas so that none might recognize her, Mary, bitterly brooding, visited the places where had passed the momentous events of her life. Sometimes, on moonlit nights, she would remain for hours crouched in the shadow, gazing with yearning pathos through the folds of her veil upon the tops of the plane and

acacia trees that rose over the walls of the gardens of the palace where she had been born . . . the same trees under which she and Maximilian had sat . . . it seemed æons ago! In the air she detected the odor of acacia blossoms—the fragrance of the same trees that had goldenly bloomed when she first learned of love. Strange, strange! . . . that love had passed, and a thousand loves had passed since, and time had wrought its changes—yet these trees bloomed as of old. Maximilian was dead—many who had loved her since had gone to the darksome land of Cerberus, but these trees still bore leaf and blossom in the resurrection of spring. And as of yore the moon—the moon that had illumined the banquets of the dead princesses of Egypt, that had sheened with silver the couches of Helen, Aspasia, Cleopatra; the eternal moon that would shine a thousand years hence when others loved and suffered and walked the same dark highway—yea, as of yore, unchanging, passionless, coldly calm, the moon shone. . . .

Far away in the gardens Mary heard the music of fountains. The stirring movement of the trees, the music of the waters, the magic of the moonlight, of the wafted odors, brought back a thousand thronging memories. Mary's heart contracted, something rose painfully in her throat. Walking to and fro, clenching her hands, tears glistened in her eyes. No, it was not Maximilian she sought. There was a curious and insidious charm in thus brooding upon her girlhood's love—but for the dead boy she felt no desire. Nor was it the memoried lure of any love's delight that drew her back to the familiar environs of her notorious abode in Bruchheim. . . . In the casements she saw lights, but no longer was the street lined with curricles, prancing steeds, gilded palanquins, and litters of ivory and juniper wood. Of that house of gilded bondage, of the ever-nagging financial anxieties, of the efforts to please men, of the ceaseless revelries turning night into day, of all this she was free. Relieved of the tyranny of possessions, the world was open before her; a vagabond woman she could wander whithersoever she pleased. She lived day by day—and any day the cup of death awaited. The sun of her life had risen and was setting; the evening was closing, and the darkness was gathering.

And what of the darkness? That question ever recurred to her. Its uncertainty, its inscrutable mystery baffled and terrified her. As of old the eternal question plagued her spirit. Was there aught beyond death? And was there peace in death? Did the gods live? Was the soul immortal? And did the soul, ever seeking, find love? Visiting the streets of her childhood whence she had been stoned, she pondered upon her life, as to how different it all might have been had she been treated with love rather than with harshness, tenderly cherished rather than cruelly driven forth from her home. Within the scope of her life she had compassed the vicissitudes of earthly fortune, the desires and disappointments of women. As eminent as had been her fame, so abysmal was her fall; as she had been proud, so had she been humiliated; as she had enjoyed luxury and praise, so she suffered privation and ignominy, seeking love she had learned the baseness of men's passions, their selfishness, cowardice, and treachery; yet, although denied and cheated by men of what her soul demanded, she was never utterly crushed—for within her heart, as a holy light, burned woman's unquenchable aspiration for freedom, woman's desire for that love which transcends passion and challenges death. Mary drank of the chalice of lonely tears and knew the bitterness of woman's heartache. Against the injustice of men she ever rebelled, and for the persecuting priesthood of Alexandria Mary felt an insupportable hate. Niobides came often into the city with bands of monks that swept the streets like a devastating sirocco. They still pursued the Arians and Jews. To Mary this fierce monk concretely represented the religion that persecuted woman, placing upon her the shameful burden of all men's sins.

This fanatic brood of desert ascetics, ignorant, illiterate, unintelligent, vain in their piety, egotistic in the practice of austerities, inflamed by that hysteria of religion which finds its victims among the lowest, narrowest, and most vulgar of mankind, gave no heed to the sublimation of woman which the Church, united under the See of Rome, was later gloriously to symbolize in the ideal of the Mother of Sorrows. Of her little had Mary the courtesan heard. Spending months in the desert, with no break in the monotony of toil, prayer, and

abnormal penance, the zeal of these bands of monks, sleeping like a volcanic fire beneath their meek and placid surface, burst forth with all the unrestrained tempestuousness and unbalanced fanaticism peculiar to the temperament of the East whenever they were led by inspired leaders on their crusades into the city. This temperament, highly charged, mercurial, passionate, weak, given equally to extremes of either indulgence or denial, was the very fuel that had flamed into the lurid decadence and vicious excesses which made the age more notorious than those of Nero and Tiberius; reacting, this same temperament found the equally extravagant denials of the desert easier than temperance in the world, and contemplative inaction more congenial than a persistent combat with the temptations and voluptuous allurements of the city. Religion meant two things—the selfish saving of one's own soul and the temporal triumph of the Church. If they could not convert the sinner, they would destroy the sinner; if heretics did not repent, they would annihilate the heretics, for, so went their rallying cry, it was better one Arian should die than that a host of believers should be led into error and thus be damned. As the followers of Mahomet were also to interpret religion, the Oriental Christians found the "spread of the gospel" a warfare, often bloody, in which the divine motive was lost and in which the spirit of bitterest hatred and unrelenting persecution dominated. Unlike the early Christians of Rome who sought no glory "where moth and rust doth corrupt," and who met death welcomingly and gently, these zealots of the East, under their tyrannical Patriarch Theophilus—as well as later under Cyril—militantly carried on their propaganda, fighting to win or to kill, to conquer or to destroy. In these bitter feuds and battles the gentle monks of the desert became redoubtable men of war.

With dim, uncomprehended, yet instinctive purpose, Mary, her face veiled, dogged the footsteps of Niobides on his incursions into the city. Often when he harangued she was among the listeners. Often when he led in one of his fiery raids she was in the forefront of the spectators. Whenever she watched him with rapacious vulturous eyes, her nails dug into her palms like the talons of a bird of prey about to swoop down

upon its victim. Whenever she heard him denounce the city and assail women, her heart swelled with rage. She felt she must scream out, "Liar! Man, thou art a liar!" Gradually her purpose defined into a compelling, intolerable desire to revenge herself, to justify herself against his accusations, to prove his vainglorious virtue a mask of weakness and hypocrisy, the fatuous strength of the untested. He haunted her dreams. She always saw him, his face rigid, his mouth set, his one hand pointing at her accusingly, in the other, flaunted aloft against the ashen moonlight, a black and fearsome cross.

The temple of Neptune, looming over the sea, with its porticos and pillars of translucent rose-marble and doors of beaten brass, gleamed in the moonlight. Beyond, on the point of Lochius darkly towered the Timonium, where Antony took Cleopatra in his arms after his defeat at Actium and braved the greater peril of her lips. More than a mile out, the charcoal fires, reflected by mirrors of brass, glowed from the summit of the Pharos. The factories of paper, glass, and perfume near the end of the canal opening on the Eunostus were silent, the streets vacant. Nigh the Gate of the Sun a watchman pursued his way. Over the waters of the harbor white gulls rose and fell, seeking fish. Near the deserted Heptastadium a woman prowled, watching. She seemed akin in her movements to the scavenger dogs and cats. Toward midnight, pausing in the shadow of a side alley, she perceived a man, his clothes in disarray, reeling home from revelry. A filled purse hung loosely from his girdle. The woman looked up and down the street; no one was near; the watchman had gone his round.

Creeping forward, her hand suddenly leaped out and snatched the purse as the man passed. The woman ran in the direction of the Sun Gate. With a sudden access of activity the man speeded after her. Gaining step by step, he caught hold of her flying mantle. The two staggered to and fro. The woman fought with vicious ferocity, her teeth sinking into the hand that held her. With a sharp cry the man released his hold, but at that very moment, with a rumble of wheels, a curricie, drawn by four white dashing steeds, swept round

a nearby corner and bore down the street. Both recognized, standing within it, the prætor of Egypt. He was followed by other chariots, bearing guards, retainers and friends. The woman slunk back into the shadows. The man she had robbed called for help. The governor drew rein—the champing horses reared to a stop.

“Arrest yon woman! She is a thief! She hath robbed me of my purse!”

Leaping from their chariots, at a signal from the governor, four guards bore down upon the fugitive, crouching in the shadow, claspings the purse to her bosom.

“It is a lie!” she gasped, “a lie!”

They dragged her forward.

“I swear to thee, excellency, this woman is a thief,” the man stammered. “I was returning peacefully homeward—peacefully, I say”—he hiccupped—“when this wench—this harpy—sprang upon me. She plucked my purse from my girdle! I demand justice!”

The governor had been to a feast and was on his way to another. The warmth of wine and pleasant company still tingled in his veins. He saw the woman’s face was fair and spoke gently: “This man hath accused thee—speak!”

She raised her head, and with a sudden inspiration drew from her bosom the purse.

“My lord, I, too, appeal to thy justice! This man saith I stole from him—’tis a lie! ’Twas when I wandered hither, my lord, yon wastrel, returning homeward full with wine, dragged me into the shadow. He thrust the purse into my hands. My lord, the purse is mine! Then, my lord, he struck me and would have taken the purse away from me. I broke away from him, excellency. ’Twas then thou and thy noble company came by. I should not dare even speak to thee, my lord, but I am not a thief!” She beat her bosom passionately. “This man is a coward and jackal! I loathe him, my lord, and, though I starve, I now spurn his purse!” She was quite splendid in her feigned indignation. “I fling back to him his gold! I spit into his face.”

With a majestic sweep of her arm, she flung the purse at the man. It jingled upon the pavement.



Bewildered, startled, the drunken man, disregarding his purse, lurched forward and blurted in a whisper:

"By Medusa! I have seen thee before. *Who—art—thou?*"

The governor, perplexed, turned to her with irritation and command in his voice:

"Who art thou? Woman, speak!"

Summoning her courage, with an imperiously proud gesture, the woman swept back from her head her scarlet cyclas, tossing from her forehead stray tresses of red-gold hair. With the boldness of desperation she faced him.

"By all the gods," muttered the governor, "it seemeth that I, too, have seen thee before——"

His wine-drugged mind struggling with elusive memories, the man she robbed mumbled:

"Thou art—thou art——"

Anticipating him, the woman said simply:

"I am Mary, once a courtesan known in Alexandria."

Startled exclamations broke from the lips of all. Astounded, the governor's friends leaped from their chariots and drew near. The governor leaned forward. Hardening his voice, he said:

"Mary of Alexandria is dead."

Bending still further, the representative of Arcadius\* studied the woman's face, his brows beetling perplexedly.

"I am as one dead, though I live," replied Mary, cold fear at her heart. "My lord, I would that I were dead!"

The governor drew up, sadly shaking his head.

"Yea, 'tis she," he murmured in astonishment. "Well do I remember the feast that aged fool Aufugus gave—'twas many years ago." He turned to his companions. "Yon woman was there—there I saw her first. By all the gods, she was beautiful! Golden as Aurora! Her wit surpassed the wisdom of the philosophers! Strange—strange is life, my friends!" He turned to Mary—"Thou wert sent to prison?"

She sank to her knees:

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\* Theodosius died of dropsy at Milan, January 17, 395, his young sons succeeding, Honorius as Emperor of the West, Arcadius of the Empire of the East.

"Yea, my lord!"

"Thou wert charged with sorceries and various crimes—why didst thou not defend thyself?"

Mary flung up her hands in a despairing gesture.

"What defence hath woman when men condemn her? The Christians had determined to destroy me. The matter was not one of justice."

The governor gazed at her silently for a moment.

"Thou wert a wonderful woman in thy day, Mary. Hadst thou lived in the time of Tiberius—ah! But this new religion hath wrought changes in the world! Verily, thou wert helpless. Tell me, they say thou didst vanish from prison?"

"Yea, my lord."

"One who knew thee, whose confidence I enjoyed, told me of thy escape. He said thou camest to him, and he gave thee money, suggesting thou go to Carthage or Antioch. Thou hadst friends, Mary; surely thou couldst have found many to help thee?"

Mary lowered her head.

"My lord, men's fancy is fickle. Many who knew me, fearing the Christians, shunned me. A few gave me enough to secure lodgings. What they gave lasted but a brief time."

"And the rest?"

"They turned away."

The governor shook his head pityingly.

"After the rumor that thou hadst escaped prison and sought help, I heard of thee no more, save that Caius Marcellus later told me thou wert dead. And thou—thou livest. . . . By the gods, Mary, I pity thee."

Picking up his purse, the drunken man turned on Mary.

"She saith I gave her this—that is a lie! None who knoweth her would have aught to do with her!"

Faint with hunger, Mary swayed forward and grasped the wheel of the governor's curricule.

"Thou art a great man and merciful," she pleaded. "Yea, I, once honored, am an outcast of the streets. I appeal to thy clemency! Excellency, let me be gone!"

"She is a thief!" shouted the drunken man. "To prison with her!"

"No, no, lord! Not that again!" Mary's voice broke imploringly.

"Hast thou friends?" asked the governor.

"None."

The governor scrutinized Mary with pitying commiseration. Because of the civil preferment given Christians the prefect, with secret reluctance, had openly professed himself a Catholic. But at heart he was a pagan and detested the faith so rigidly observed by the reigning sons of Theodosius.

"If the Christians learned of thee they would set upon thee as dogs and rend thee," he said. "Even now they would tear thee limb from limb. They alone have not forgotten thee, and how, in the days of thy power, thou didst start the great massacre. Tell me, Mary, why didst thou hate them with such rancor?"

In the sudden hush, broken only by the rattle of the restless horses' harness, Mary, gazing fixedly at the governor, her hands tightening on the hub of the chariot wheel, drew herself to her full height. In the livid pallor of her sunken face her eyes heated to the molten glare of liquid lead. Through her writhing lips her voice hissed:

"*Didst hate?*" Her tone hoarsened. "Still hate, lord governor. For have they not robbed me of all—my home, my fame, my friends, my wealth, my beauty! Did they not pursue me with vile obloquy?—did they not hound me as a dog?—did they not throw me into prison?—did they not condemn me to a shameful death? Have they not made my life that of a rat, hiding in holes, afraid of the day! And what have they left me?—nothing, lord, nothing—*but what I am!* What I am! I, that was Mary of Alexandria! An outcast, a fugitive, starved, abased, abused, shunned, loathed as the leper! Lord governor, do they not hate—hate all that is fair in the world—hate life, sunlight, flowers, beauty, woman, love? My father was a Christian. Upon my mother, dying, he tried in vain to force his loathsome faith. To me, a child, love came—love, love—and because I loved and was loved I was driven from my home—my father flogged me, the dogs stoned me!" She paused. "Lord governor, thou knowest not what hatred is!"

Her words lashed the air. From her grim, frigid face,

her liquid eyes scorched. In the silver moonlight her tall figure, glooming fearsomely, seemed to magnify in stature. Appalled, the governor's attendants drew back, and her drunken accuser shrank away. Attracted by his movement, Mary turned to him.

"Yea," said she bitterly. "Clutch thy purse to thy heart! For this is what the Christians have made of me—me, Mary of Alexandria, a thief!" Facing the governor defiantly, "Yea, a thief! Well, excellency, what wilt thou do with me?"

Fascinated with horror, the governor muttered:

"Mary of Alexandria—Mary of Alexandria, a thief!"

"A thief—she admitteth she is a thief," slobbered the drunken reveller, lurching forward, "To the prison——"

The governor lifted his whip and smote the man across the face.

"Begone, thou dog! Away with thee!"

Then he turned to Mary, repeating as if to himself incredulously: "A thief—Mary of Bruchenum a thief!"

Stirred with an impotent, hopeless pity, he leaned forward and gently loosened Mary's hand from the chariot wheel. Plucking from his girdle a heavy purse, he thrust it into her unresisting hand.

"Come," said he softly to his attendants. "Let us be gone."

Silently, without a word, they entered their chariots. The vehicles made a black, crawling line on the thoroughfare. Rigid in the moonlight, Mary, gazing with unseeing eyes, stood alone. Slowly her hands dropped inertly to her side, and with a clang the heavy purse fell unheeded to the stones. So Mary stood for a moment. Then, turning, as one in a trance, she walked away.

Grotesque shadows, silent and spectral, stretched ragged arms across the Agora. The Heptastadium, void of life, extended to the Pharos island like a silver bridge spanning the sea. Along the quays and in the open harbor ships lifted at their moorings. On the vessels, like sentient eyes, watch-lights burned; but the decks were still; the sailors slept. Amid the labyrinthine shadows of piled timber, bales of merchandise, and stacked corn along the quays, a monk with

arms folded upon his breast, paced to and fro repeating the formulæ of his devotion. Midnight was long past. Startled by the sound of steps, the monk looked forth from his hood. To his amazement he saw the tall, dark-swathed figure of a woman approaching. This monk, known to his brethren as Nebridius, had never gazed upon the face of woman. Timidly he shrank back into the shadows, but not before the woman, seeing him, paused, but for a moment only. Steadily advancing, she came deliberately up to him and before he could move away placed her hand upon his arm.

"I salute thee, monk."

The voice that spoke was low, sinisterly beguiling, treacherously sweet.

Down in the hold of the pilgrim galley, bound for Joppa, in a free space amid great bales of treasure, Mary of Alexandria crouched, her green eyes glowing like direful stars in the dark. By her side lay a basket of bread and a gurglet of wine brought her by Nebridius, the monk she had beguiled. There was a sweet savor in her mouth; the vitality of a grim enthusiasm charged her. In the thought of the audacity of this adventure, the ghastly jest of the revenge she planned, all the lethargy and depression that had weighed upon her for days and months passed. Out of the night, when least expected, when she seemed utterly undone, the supreme opportunity for revenge had come to her.

"At last, at last," she breathed, "kind gods, sweet gods, have ye delivered mine enemies unto me! Delicious gods, I thank you! Yea, through all the years now do I know that you have led me! That your purpose has guided me! Oh, blessed gods! That unto me, who was reviled and spat upon, should be given this justification! That unto me, who was persecuted, thrown into prison, and condemned to death should be given the humiliation of these vain-glorious despisers of women! Ah, Niobides"—her voice rasped with exultant hatred—"thou didst triumph once—but now art thou given unto me! Monstrous madman! Thy memory hath rankled in my veins as poison! As I walked the streets with weary feet the hatred of thee hath been a crawling worm within my

heart. Ah! Now I shall go unto thee. Now I shall meet thee face to face." She sprang to her feet, and the words leaped from her lips. "Yea, and now I shall fling thy foul insults and lies into thy teeth! I shall make thee a fool unto thy Christ!"

The galley rocked as a cradle on the waves. The wind whined in the rigging like the crying of a child. The hawsers lashed the ship's side, the chain guiding the rudder rattled, the masts creaked. In the lower decks the sandalled feet of the seamen slipped and shuffled. Mary lay back in the security of her hiding place, deliciously relaxed in a reverie of malignantly gloating vindictive expectation. Through the distant hold she heard the monotonous intoning of prayers—then voices upraised in song:

O Thou true Life of all that live,  
Who dost, unmoved, all motion away,  
Who dost the morn and evening give,  
And through its changes guide the day!

Thy light upon our evening pour,  
So may our souls no sunset see;  
Let death to us an open door  
To an eternal morning be!

Merging into the sound of the kissing waters the hymn faintly died away—

Father of mercies, hear our cry!  
Hear us, O sole-begotten Son,  
Who, with the Holy Ghost most high,  
Reigneth while endless ages run!

Over Mary's face passed a baleful anticipatory smile.

## XVII

THESE monks of Nitria, like ravening wolves in their fanatical crusades into Alexandria, were among themselves as gentle as lambs. Except for their struggles with demons, which were constant, their life was one of quiet meditation and peaceful prayer. Earthly existence being but a prelude to divine blessedness, they despised the pleasures of the world and all who were deceived thereby, and impatiently awaited death. If they had aught of pride it was in excessive meekness and humility and a spirit of obedience to the will of their superiors; aught of pleasure they enjoyed was in fasting and the unremitting mortification of the flesh. Without ambition in the vain works and pomps of the world, they sought eminence only in self-torments of unprecedented and unparalleled severity. As their reputation for sanctity rose in proportion to the length of their fasts and the extremes of their sufferings, they displayed the most wonderful ingenuity in the invention of new and extravagant tortures. At the height of their agonies they sometimes enjoyed ecstatic trances.

The routine followed on the galley by those favored to go on the pilgrimage under Niobides was practically the same as that of the desert. They rose before dawn, engaged in prayer, chanted their morning hymns, and breakfasted on bread, salt, and water. They ate no food whatever during the day. In the evening they again partook meagrely of bread and water, and sometimes were allowed a sip of wine, a few dates, olives and lentils in which a little oil was mixed.\* They spent the day performing the various labors to which they were assigned, such as weaving hairskin garments and plaiting mats and baskets of reeds. All spent certain hours in prayer and penance.

In order to discipline their spirits, they bound their limbs

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\* The food allowance of these monks averaged less than six ounces of bread daily. Evagrius, ordained a deacon in Constantinople by Gregory of Nazianzen, went with Gregory to Egypt, where he became a disciple of the monks and chronicler of their austerities. One of them, says he, "was accustomed to say, 'a dry and not irregular diet, combined with love, will quickly conduct a monk to the heaven of tranquillity.'"

with cords and chains, wore collars of massy iron about their necks, exposed themselves to the heat of the sun, lacerated their flesh, placing salt in their wounds, and flogged one another with whips until they swooned. The number and variety of their self-inflicted chastisements were incredible.

One of the brethren, Archippus by name, who paced the decks loudly declaiming fragments of the Psalms, had won a veneration exceeded in Egypt by only that accorded Niobides himself. Archippus was tall, lean-boned, with beetling black eyebrows and deep-sunken wild eyes. He had been an orator in Corinth, and his eloquence was terrible. His time was spent expounding the punishments reserved for the unjust; the contemplation of Hell's most horrible torments, as well as discourse thereupon, gave him infinite relish. Archippus had appeared in the desert for worship one morning before his brethren with his hands and feet marked with the stigmata. That one of their community should be thus conspicuously honored with visible evidence of celestial esteem was the cause of great rejoicing and a matter of no little vainglorious pride among the monks; this became only the greater when, each morning, Archippus appeared with the wounds flowing afresh, which indubitably indicated the continued favor in which he was held by heaven.

Only one of the number, Epaphras, had been unawed by the marvel; indeed, he was known to have uttered sceptical blasphemies, even treating the miracle with levity. Consequently, between the two brethren existed a spirit not quite in keeping with those sentiments of brotherly love so assiduously fostered. In the desert Epaphras had cultivated a garden of peas, lentils, and melons, singing while he hoed, enjoying life with the bland innocence of a happy child. Despite his fastings, Epaphras was anything but lean of flesh. To the contrary, he evinced such physical evidence of luxurious living, such an ill-favored, well-nourished corpulence, as well as so amiable and good-natured a content with life, that Archippus gave voice to the suspicion that demons brought rich repasts of foods to him by night, such as infernal beeves, roast herons, cooked eggs, cheeses, and wine, of which he sinfully partook.

So disturbed was Niobides when he heard the rumored



goings-on between his disciple and the powers of evil that, although Epaphras by his works deserved no such honor, the blessed abbot decided, for the sake of his immortal soul, to take him along on the pilgrimage. Thus, at any rate, he could keep him under his spiritual eye.

In the shade of the sails the various monks, in peaceful content, performed their labors. Onesiphorus, who had been a sculptor in Rome, began to hew out of a block of stone a crude figure of the Blessed Mother; Victorinus, who spent his days copying the Scriptures upon parchment, began his three hundred and thirty-ninth copy of the Epistles of St. Paul. Another monk, Cadocus by name, embellished these writings in paints with pious designs. These parchments were gilded and placed between plates of ivory. Alypius, who had studied music in the monastery of St. Ambrose at Milan, taught the monks, while they worked, antiphons and hymns in Latin. Sylvanus, who had acquired vain and false honors in the schools of grammar and rhetoric at Carthage, was engaged in writing verses in which he celebrated the miracles of the martyrs of the Serapium.

Galbus, the oldest of the community, by reason of prayer, fasting, and continence, had reached the ripe age of a hundred and eight. Because of these virtues he did not suffer the usual infirmities of age, and possessed a lucid memory, his mind being encyclopædic in its knowledge of the vicissitudes of the Church in Alexandria. His head was bald as an ostrich egg; his eyes were small, brightly ferret-like, and on the polished skin of his face, drawn taut over the cheek-bones, glowed two spots of color which Sylvanus had poetically likened to celestial roses painted by the angels as testimony of Galbus's virtues. In his sinful youth Galbus had been a robber. He devoted his venerable days to weaving baskets. While he worked in the shade of the sails his mind reverted reminiscently to the persecutions enjoyed of old by the brethren. He told of the terrible days when St. Athanasius was driven to the desert and over four hundred holy bishops were slain. Galbus approved of those parlous times—for then men's faith was strong. He deplored the peace and prosperity which the Church now enjoyed; men's faith would become effete, he feared.

Nebridius and a half dozen others had charge of the kitchen. Their trial was severe. Preparing food for the sailors, who were worldly men; their stomachs would cry aloud. But they stilled these evil cravings, knowing that in reward they would be regaled at celestial banquets. Agatho, who had been a seaman, sat in the steering-house all day, guiding the chain attached to the rudder, so it might be said the galley was directed from port to port by consecrated hands. Not the least important of the band was Simplicianus—who was to Niobides what Paul had been to St. Anthony; as Paul, Simplicianus was also surnamed “the Fool.” A lean, dropsical youth, with vacant staring eyes, big ears, a drooping under-lip, and a skin given to eruptions, Simplicianus spent weeks and months in impressive silence. After long periods he would break forth into ravings and confound the monks with amazing prophecy. None understood what he said. While the other monks were given rigorous labors and encouraged to self-flagellations, “the Fool” was allowed to pass his days in idleness, was pampered with the choicest foods, even oil and eggs, and was treated by his reverent brethren with most distinguished consideration. Epaphras alone regarded him with jest, once remarking, to the scandalization of his brethren, “There are always fools among the saints.” Simplicianus, crouching amidship, gazed blankly at the sky from morn to eve as if he saw some fearful portent. . . . His lips mumbled, and the monks in passing near would listen with reverent gravity, but no words came.

The pilgrim band numbered two score.

These pious men were beset with terrible temptations always. Niobides, who kept a careful watch upon his children, failed not to mark, when they gathered for song and praise the morning of the second day at sea, that some more than usual disquieting influence had made itself felt the night before. Three of the brethren buried their faces in their hoods, as those who are ashamed of having surrendered in thought to sin. Epaphras’s eyes, amid rolls of fat, twinkled with wicked merriment. Some of the brethren, noting this, whispered that it was more than probable he had been imbibing of demon wine the night before.

During the day, having lacerated his flesh and put salt in the wounds, Maro lay on the deck, naked save for a loin-cloth, exposing himself to the heat of the sun until his flesh was scorched and festered. Nebrius was nervously agitated and when spoken to abruptly would start as though caught in some guilty action.

Late one afternoon one of the brethren by accident happened upon a confounding, inexplicable, and absolutely infernal thing. His soul uplifted in prayer, this brother was walking along one of the lower tiers of decks when, of a sudden, he came to a pause, the prayer throttled in its very utterance, his gaze riveted by a spectacle of such extraordinary sort that he could not credit the evidences of his senses. Epaphras, believing himself alone, was engaged in some unaccountable and at first totally bewildering actions at the farther end of the deck passage. At first the amazed and utterly nonplussed brother thought Epaphras was performing some exceptional form of penance. But slowly the infamous import of what he beheld dawned upon him. Epaphras was dancing! His heavy body swayed to and fro, his feet made grotesque movements under him. He dawdled his arms abandonedly in the air and anon playfully waved his chubby hands above his head as though to some invisible partner. He wheeled about, pirouetted, and occasionally gave high kicks, at the same time humming a profane and utterly blasphemous song. Now and then, as he leaped, he uttered low screams of merriment or broke out in chuckles of unconstrained glee. The terrified beholder stood awestruck, chilled to the marrow—then the truth flashed upon him. *Epaphras was dancing with a demon!*

Turning on his heels the flabbergasted brother rushed to the upper deck, where, panting, breathless, he confided to several what his eyes had seen. Although they realized the jeopardy of any proximity to demons, they armed themselves with prayer and returned with him. They arrived on the lower passage just in time to hear Epaphras utter a wild heigh-ho and go prancing down the deck.

"He hath a devil," whispered one.

"He consorteth with a demon," said Cadocus in affright.

"He hath lost his soul," added Archippus with a finality of utterance that was not without a certain satisfaction in the consummation of the inevitable.

They looked at one another for a long while and spoke no word. Then they returned cautiously to the upper deck, where they saw their abandoned brother making an ostentatious show of prayer. The rumor that Epaphras danced with a ravishingly beautiful demon spread among the brethren. None, however, out of pious forbearance, reported this to the abbot.

When they broke bread that evening, one of those who had gone about abashed, his face hidden all day, broke down in a fit of uncontrollable weeping. Niobides approvingly regarded this manifestation of a chastened spirit as showing the proper shame and remorse a brother should feel for having entertained temptation. Realizing they were on a voyage of unusual import, one of profound sanctity, and that temptations equal to the grace they hoped to receive might beset them, Niobides fell to discoursing upon the Evil One and the liberties he is so often allowed.

"My sweet children," said he, "the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We have ventured forth on a journey to one of the most holy spots upon earth and have been honored with bearing precious gifts wherewith to bedeck the holy places. I have to warn you this evening that as the soul increases in holiness, Satan becomes all the more desirous for its possession; as one approaches a source of grace, that foul fiend becomes only the more enraged and desperate in his efforts to waylay and beguile it. It has therefore happened, my brethren, that some of the most heinous crimes have been committed in churches. We must be ever on our guard, and especially now as we go forward on our blessed pilgrimage. Do not be surprised if you suffer temptations exceeding all that have gone before. Expect Satan to come in most alluring guises, even, as a last resort, in seemingly divine visions. Remember that St. Anthony once beheld an ineffably beautiful child in the sand. At first he thought—yea, let us bravely remember what he thought—he thought it was the Child Jesus. But Anthony was cautious

and prayed. That beautiful child was lust in disguise!" While Niobides spoke, Allamides threw himself on his face and cried aloud for heaven's mercy.

"Already," continued Niobides, "I have observed the presence of the foul fiend among you. Perchance ye have been troubled in dreams. Have not all of us dreamt of evil creatures who seduced us with their beauty, and as we woke in our huts did we not find jackals at our couch? Satan is infinite in his cunning. Be not deceived. Receive even what may seem heavenly manifestations with proper caution. Never cease to pray, and ever expect afflictions that may test the iron of your souls. Remember, nevertheless, that the glory of spiritual victory is great according to the strength of that which is conquered, and the most terrible trials may result ultimately to the advantage of the spirit."

Knowing the truth of what he expounded so felicitously, Niobides was not unduly alarmed at the uneasiness and distracted confusion which, as the first days of the voyage passed, were increasingly manifested among his flock. He sensed some mysterious and hostile presence among his band, and observed evidences of terrific spiritual struggles on the part of many of the brethren. In the morning, when they met, the hands of a number of them shook so nervously that they could hardly lift the bread to their mouths. Some buried their faces, averting their gaze, while others cautiously peered from their cowls with suspicious, furtive, questioning gaze. The eyes of some were red as from violent weeping. Their faces were drawn and pale. One or two fell into a dull torpor of melancholia, crouching on their knees all day long as if paralyzed with fright. Those who had been addicted to those practices cut open their wounds, lacerated their limbs, flogged themselves, and exposed their ulcers more assiduously than ever. Hour by hour an inexplicable contagion of panic-stricken remorse and hysteric perturbation spread among the little family. Going about among them, Niobides gently and unceasingly spoke words of cheer and admonition, urging them not to lose courage and to be indefatigable and persevering in their battle with the powers of darkness. When he spoke, one would throw himself on his face and weep uncontrollably, another would

groan, another smite his breast; others, buried in abstraction, did not hear. Some indeed acted as though they had been guilty of sin. While the wave of hysteria spread, Archippus became more grimly terrible in his exposition of divine punishment and Epaphras more scandalously worldly in his behavior. This impious monk would suddenly burst into fits of laughter while his brethren prayed, and into the singing of hymns he entered with such uproarious vehemence and gusto, his corpulent body heaving, his one chubby hand uplifted and waving, that, shocked at what appeared an unseemly gaiety, Niobides was constrained once or twice to silence him with a look of reproof.

All met regularly at prayer, however, and performed their tasks, even if listlessly. But every now and then, in the midst of work or prayer, one would jump to his feet as if the great demon had prodded him with his fork, and madly rush into the depth of the boat. The seamen, passing one thus running, would themselves flee, believing that demons were in pursuit. Perplexed but not surprised, Niobides observed that some mysteriously sinister and baleful influence was disorganizing the repose and spiritual peace these men had enjoyed in the desert.

Among other things Niobides noted that an increasing number of the brethren took to midnight prayer and could not be found upon their pallets. But realizing that voluntary prayers at night, necessitating the sacrifice of sleep, have more efficacy than the prayers of day, the good abbot was not troubled. It came, however, to pass that those who sought an inviolable seclusion in which to combat temptation at night constantly ran into one another in the nether regions of the ship. Feeling about in the darkness, they would sometimes fall over each other, making an unearthly clatter. One of the brethren, Cadocus, meandering in the hold, touched a soft garment and thereupon, lurching forward, embraced that which he touched. He found it to be Nebridius, from whose arms, as they collided, rolled some loaves of bread and a receptacle filled with wine. Both were overcome with confusion.

"Thou art late at prayer," gasped Nebridius, the demon of rage and suspicion possessing him.

"As thou art given to curious and late banqueting," replied Cadocus, enraged and disconcerted. They separated in the dark.

On the tenth day at sea the shipmaster came to Niobides, deploring the lack of wind and the loss of time made by the galley. He suggested that prayers be offered by the holy men for increased wind. At Niobides's command this was accordingly done. Then Archippus arose at the prow, as was customary, to intone the Psalms.

His face was gaunt; his brows beetled. He lifted his voice, hollow and sonorous, thus:

"Put me not to rebuke, O Lord, in thine anger; neither chastise me in Thy heavy displeasure. For Thine arrows stick fast in me: and Thy hand presses me sore."

Some of the kneeling bodies began to rock to and fro.

"There is no health in my flesh, because of Thy displeasure; neither is there any rest in my bones by reason of my sin."

A chorus of low sobbing arose.

"For my wickednesses are gone over my head, and are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear. My wounds are corrupt through my foolishness."

One of the ascetics passed into a faint.

The following day was hot and sultry. The galley seemed at a standstill on the glassy sea. The great white sails hung limp on the four masts. Not a breath of air relieved the intolerable dead heat. The earth seemed compressed in a burning vacuum. Late in the afternoon Niobides came on deck. The sun was descending. The massed clouds were the color of copper; the sea along the horizon resembled a furnace vomiting slag. A reddish haze suffused the atmosphere.

While he tranquilly gazed across the water the shipmaster approached. Crossing himself, he addressed the abbot:

"We are in the hands of God! Only twice have I seen such a sky!"

"What meanest thou?" asked Niobides.

"A storm, perchance, such as seldom assaileth goodly ships.

I know not how soon 'twill come—in an hour, perhaps, unless the signs fail. It will be a terrible night. May the angels preserve us!”

He was an old man, and there was white fear in his eyes. Niobides made the sign of the cross.

“Thou hast spoken truly—we are in the hands of God,” he said. Niobides had no fear of death.

“I but tell thee, holy father, so thou mayest be prepared. Perchance if thou and thy brethren pray, the Lord will temper the winds.” Thus saying, he departed.

As the sun went down a hot wind blew fitfully up over the edge of the sea. It came in swift belching gusts that increased in volume and force with incredible rapidity. Soon the waves heaved like liquid metal boiling in a monstrous caldron. The fierce wind tore at the sails. The air snapped and cracked with invisible whips. The heat was insupportable; one could not breathe without pain. The heavens were scarlet.

“’Tis well to-night, holy father, that ye pray for our souls,” said the captain, again approaching Niobides. The seamen, with great difficulty because of the coming tempest, were lowering the sails. The captain was bent with years and had sailed the seven seas of the world; his face, wrinkled like corrugated leather, was disquieted and anxious. “It will be a miracle if no danger befalls us before the morn.”

“Be without fear, Valentius,” said Niobides. “We have not to fear storms of seas, earthquakes and hail; they cannot harm the soul. I tell thee the vices of that accursed city, Alexandria and the thrice-accursed lies of the Arians and other infidels, are more perilous than ten thousand storms.”

“I am a Christian. Thou speakest the truth,” replied the mariner. “Thou hast done much,” he added admiringly, “to quell those tempests of error and vice in that unfortunate city.”

Niobides answered with simple seriousness:

“None perchance has done more to purge that stinking cesspool of corruption than I.”

Driven far from its course, the great galley for hours seemed literally sucked through a roaring black abysm. The heavens exploded. The hot winds scourged. Incessant light-



nings, green and reddish tinged, ran down the sky like zig-zagging rivers of quicksilver. The waters churned like a monstrous maelstrom. The whole sea boiled.

X Plunged into this terrifying experience from the unbroken calm of their desert retreat, it seemed to the pilgrims that they were being engulfed in the very maws of hell itself. They could not otherwise account for the awful clamor of the wind and waves and tumult of sea than that the demons of hell had stirred the elements to chaos and were tossing the ship from one to another with fiendish malice, even as children play at ball.

Y In a gloomy cabin beneath the second deck of the galley they cringed and cowered, their teeth chattering, their lips white. On the faces of these holy men was that stark frozen terror of those who die in sin. It required no effort of the imagination for them to hear sounds quite distinct and recognizable as coming from the fiends, and to see within the ship and near to them manifestations of their infernal tormentors.

A single torch, held in a sconce on one of the wooden stanchions supporting the deck above, lighted the cabin, and revealed them clinging to whatever they could for support—stanchions, huge bales, hogsheads, cedar chests containing treasure, and swinging ropes. Hurling every now and then from the supports to which they clung, the monks uttered whining cries, and, crawling or rolling over the floor, frantically clutched at one another. Many groaned and whimpered in hysteric fear; others, for terror, were stricken dumb. Of all that devout company only three seemed unperturbed by the pandemonium of the elements.

On the countenance of Galbus was the sweet satisfaction of one who, growing old in virtue, attains an eternal youth nothing can destroy. Simplicianus, securely intrenched in an aperture between bales, occasionally broke his trance-like torpor to turn from one monk to another with disconcerting suddenness, point an accusing finger, breaking each time into childish giggling, ghastly and sinister. Far from ignoring these demonstrations as foolish and of no import, each monk thus singled out was plunged into a more desperate panic, some trembling so violently they could hardly hold to their

supports. Niobides, his eyes closed, prayed constantly, pausing to utter words of assurance whenever a lull in the uproar permitted him to be heard.

"If it be the will of the Lord that we perish, remember, brethren, that death is the door to divine glory."

This statement, instead of the courage it should have inspired, invoked only groans of the most abjectly hopeless and uncontained despair.

With the undisturbed tranquillity of one whose faith in a miraculous protection is implicit, Niobides clung to a pillar, in the full glare of the torch-light, on his face an expression of smiling confidence which seemed further to increase the discomfiture of his disciples.

A veritable army of fiends seemed to make onslaughts on the ship, their voices upraised in some monstrous litany of their own, sung in praise of the Prince of Darkness. Quite distinctly the monks heard hammerings on the side of the vessel, and they thereby knew the devils were endeavoring to beat in the ship; they could even hear the sharp prongs of their hell-forks prick the prow, whereupon the ship groaned. The monks knew even inanimate objects responded to the attacks of demons.

"Be of good heart, my children," said Niobides, in one of the intermittent lulls, "and remember, whatever betides, we are safe from the powers of darkness so long as we ourselves refuse to surrender."

This remark seemed to provoke the infernal hosts to a derisive howl. The cowering monks quite plainly heard the hungry clicking of demon jaws and the impatient snapping of demon teeth.

Piercing the howling of the wind, the threshing of the waters, and explosions of the skies came shrill, sweet, whining sounds that made the monks' flesh creep.

"God help us!" shrieked Archippus, his face turning green. "The accursed witches of the deep surround us! Woe! Woe!"

Listening, the group heard the seductive siren calls of the Nereides—those fearful demon-women, half-human, half-fish, who lured men by their beauty into the deep and drowned

them in the meshes of their soft wet hair. The monks knew how Father Anthony had been tempted by one of these and how, when he made the sign of the cross, the creature disappeared.

Terrible blasts, growing fiercer and shriller, belched over the sea, and each time the fearful swelling summons of the cyclopean shell-horn died away with shrill whistling echoes, the sirens in growing multitudes answered.

"'Tis Neptune, the false god of the sea!" groaned Sylvanus. "The monsters of the pagan world are released for our destruction!"

"Gird yourselves in the armor of faith," said Niobides; "lift up your hearts. For if it be true, brethren, that these accursed creatures have been released from the bondage to which they were condemned at the founding of the Church, it but reveals to us that some heinous sin hath been committed upon the earth. Let us pray!"

The monks gazed at one another hopelessly. One or two tried to speak, but their jaws seemed locked. Another wild peal rent the air, and a legion of hideous creatures, with no more substance than shadows, took flight through the cabin. Galbus, whose eyes glowed more brilliantly than ever, and who seemed not greatly distressed, spoke. What he said was heard only in fragments as the noise periodically abated.

"I took my vows under the holy Anthony . . . well 'do I remember. . . . It hath been asserted by some Christians that the false gods never had any existence, but were the imagination of evil men. How then could they be false? . . . That which hath no existence hath qualities neither of truth nor untruth. . . . The blessed Anthony said . . . He beheld the false gods of the entire world. . . . They tempted him."

Whipped into increasing fury hour by hour, the tempest shook the foundation of the seas. The ship was borne like a leaf and at furious speed up and over mountains of angry water. The majority of the monks were seized with sickness. They believed they were going to die. To add to their misery, the fiends outside constantly increased in number, and the brethren could hear them descending turbulently in legions from the skies.

Against the side of the ship, in brief subsidences of the thunder and wind, the monks heard frantic swishings, as if in fits of impatience, of demons' tails. They heard foul rumblings in the bellies of fiends. The very proximity of these hellish tormentors intolerably heated the vessel. The air within the cabin became oppressively close and hot. Already ill, the monks could smell the nauseous sulphur of the infernal pits.

Uttering a scream, Alypius grasped hold of Sylvanus. He crouched near the floor, one hand trembling as he pointed into the darkness beyond.

"Yonder—beholdest thou it, brother Sylvanus? 'Tis a black serpent; it hath blue wings; on its head it hath a crown of stars! . . ."

"We are in the hands of the evil ones! We are lost! Lost!"

Niobides, blazing with righteous anger, cried:

"We are in the hands of God! Believe, and ye shall be saved!"

The light of the torch, with the increasing motion of the boat, flared fitfully, and hosts of phantom shapes, black as night, but bodyless, swept about in mad routs. Some moved with a sidling motion as women swinging their hips. Eldritch monsters shook grisly arms, tattered like rags, as if beckoning that hopeless fraternity to some unimaginable doom.

Out of the darkness monstrous bats appeared, animals with human members, demons with great horns. Some of the monks beheld the terrifying false gods of the ancient world, human shapes with beast-heads, and sphinxes and chimeras with the faces of women.

"The monsters of hell are about us! Lord, save us ere we perish!"

Niobides, looking about, could not himself fail to see the wraith-like hosts appearing and vanishing. Observing the utter despair and panic of his flock, he raised his head, crying aloud:

"Lord, why hast Thou brought these abominations hither? Have we done aught to deserve the company of demons and loathsome monsters? Have we been amiss in deeds of omission

or commission? Verily we ourselves prefer the delightful intimacy of the angels! Get thee behind me, Satan! Lord, may these unholy creatures be gone from us!"

Scarcely had he spoken when the ship was struck a mighty blow. There was a thunderous explosion, as of a volcanic mountain splitting; the vessel paused, trembling, when immediately hell itself seemed to open and engulf the cabin in flame. With a deafening roar, a snorting, writhing monster of livid fire seethed snake-like through the cabin. Its huge jaws gaped desirously; it breathed blue smoke; its burning wings smote the air as it passed. In an instant it was gone. A suffocating stench of brimstone remained behind.

"The devil hath come for our souls!" Sylvanus alone found voice.

All the monks lay on their faces, paralyzed. The lightning bolt, which struck and traversed the ship, had been seen by all. None had ever before seen the devil so closely face to face in such horrific guise. They were utterly confounded.

The timbers of the ship snapped and crackled like the limbs of a tree straining in a storm. The galley shuddered like a sick thing. Niobides spoke with difficulty:

"It seemeth the devil is given power to try us to the uttermost. Myself I have often seen visions of the angels, and, as ye know, once beheld the blessed apostle to the Ephesians sitting in a tent of fire in heaven. Never before have I beheld the devil. This must be either a punishment or a warning. Let us not lose hope. Be on your guard and alert lest the powers of evil, so dangerously near, take you unawares."

Regaining their wits, the monks gathered close together, some bravely trying to pray.

"I have sinned, I have sinned," moaned Paul, foam on his lips, beating his breast, overcome with terror, over and over again. Archippus gibbered the creed formulated by the Nicene fathers. Galbus, trembling, consoled himself: "Methinks I have been given to see what was not beheld by the blessed Anthony; therefore, while the experience is decidedly not pleasant, I shall have memories when I reach heaven not enjoyed even by that holy man."

Suddenly the light of the torch was extinguished. A gust

of wind belched through the cabin. Crushing a hatch, a deluge of water entered the ship. There followed an uncanny lull—one of those awesome intermittent silences of tempests. Quite clearly the monks heard the bubbling rush and purl of receding waters above, as well as the scurrying feet of the seamen in the passage. They heard more. Recoiling with an agony of apprehension and terror exceeding all they had suffered, they heard, in the darkness close and near to them, an explosive and utterly terrifying outburst of laughter—the rippling laughter of a woman suddenly convulsed and carried away with uncontrollable mocking mirth. Goading in its irrepressible, baleful triumph and malevolently jeering scorn, peal after peal rippled mirthfully, the voice quickly receding toward the nether depths. The satanic echoes were lost in the renewed clamor of the wind and waves.

Stricken dumb, their marrow froze and cold perspiration bathed them. Giving way to utter panic as the infernal taunt receded, the monks tore at their hair and plucked their beards like madmen. Alypius, Maro, Cadocus, Archippus, and others rent their robes and howled. They yelled for light. Several fainted. Even Niobides, who had been blind and deaf to many of the manifestations, spasmodically ceased his supplication.

“The fiend—the fiend!” shrieked Paul, beating his head against a stanchion. “The fiend is amongst us!”

A piteous wailing filled the bowels of the galley.

“She hath come to claim our souls! She will destroy us!”

“It is Lilith, who tempted Adam!”

“O God, my God . . .” the resonant voice of Archippus pleaded. . . . “Renew a right spirit within my bowels. . . . Cast me not away from Thy presence . . .”

“We are lost . . . we are lost . . .”

A sailor, entering, struck flint. The torch flared and spluttered. Huddling together, their faces as white and rigid as corpses, the monks looked about fearfully. The light revealed neither fiend nor woman.

Niobides, having prayed, turned to his band with a grave, stern face, and spoke thus:

"We prayed for a wind, and a storm came upon us; we prayed that the weather might be fair, and we are engulfed in a tempest. The sea is wrought and tempestuous. For what cause have these evils come upon us, and why are we thus afflicted? Perhaps there is one with sin among you! If so, let him speak. Perhaps there is one with the burden of impurity, or deceit, or pride upon his soul. If so, let him confess! Let us not be foolish or stiff-necked in our pride or our shame. Let him who hath sin upon his soul unburden himself, lest all of us perish!"

Nearly all prostrated themselves, grovelling on their knees, with arms beseechingly extended. Distraught with excess of terror, with a startling simultaneousness they found voice. Though he bent his head, Niobides could not hear a single one by reason of the clamor which assailed his ears.

"Peace, peace, brethren, peace!" he murmured over and over, solicitously surveying his affrighted flock.

Onesiphorus crept forward. His face was livid.

"I have sinned. I have grievously sinned!" His voice was hollow and dull. "Holy father, a fiend in the form of a woman came one night unto me!"

Wailing cries arose on all sides.

"Yea, she came also unto me and I ceased to pray!"

"A demon goeth with us on the journey!"

"She haunteth the ship each night! God have mercy!"

"She assumeth flesh and then dissolveth into the air when her will is done. Woe! Woe unto us!"

"She cometh in the form of a woman I knew in Alexandria in my youth. I forget her name."

"She feareth not the sign of the cross."

"We have sinned! We have sinned!"

"We are damned! Our souls are lost!"

Niobides roared over the clamor:

"Silence, brethren! Is it not enough that ye have sinned, that ye should sin thrice damnably by doubting the mercy of God! Have not the holy councils of fathers decided that despair of God's grace is one of the sins against the Holy Ghost? Humble yourselves in that true spirit of trustful repentance and seek pardon, lest, of presumptuous doubt and

despair, you commit the sin for which there is no absolution either in this world or the world to come."

Grovelling on his face, Allamides made confession:

"Grievously have I sinned, blessed father! I, too, have given myself unto this demon. Darkness engulfs me! The mouth of hell screams for its food! Oh, miserable fool! Oh, damned, deluded wretch!"

"Woe unto us!" Niobides rent his garment. Dismayed by the appalling confessions, shame and sorrow and wrath filled him. "Bow your heads! Weep!" he thundered. "Cringe before an outraged heaven. Yea, woe, woe unto us! Was it for this I led you forth from the desert upon this blessed journey? Oh, miserable men, that ye should be so weak! Was it for this you denied yourselves of that despicable creature, woman? Yea, only to commit a sin more heinous and to consort with a fiend? Better had you remained in the mires of the world! Better had you sunk into that caldron of false delights men call the love of woman! Better than this unspeakable intercourse with hell itself! Sins in which human beings share, as we know from the fathers, can be forgiven! But no Council hath spoken concerning those infamies in which one engages with devils!"

A dozen voices cried aloud, clamoring to be heard. Horrified and terror-stricken, Niobides buried his face in his hands. "I am ashamed of you! I am ashamed!" He wept bitterly.

As if driven by some unseen force, Archippus, his face drawn, his eyes burning, cringed forward to the feet of Niobides.

As one who proffers a sacrifice, Archippus extended his two palms. His arms shook as with palsy. Glaring as one stark mad upon the drawn red cicatrix of the wounds, he spat upon his palms, his voice sobbing. The storm momentarily abating, he cried aloud:

"'Twas a lie! 'Twas a lie! 'Twas a lie I told when I said heaven had imprinted upon my hands and my feet the blessed wounds of Christ! Yea, my pride obsessed me, and I desired the honor of men for my service of the Lord! Therefore did I myself drive nails into my hands and my feet! Yea, contending within myself that I accomplished only what God himself



desired, I persuaded myself to believe that in mimicking the wounds of His Son I was but the instrument of His will! Oh, monstrous deceit! But who shall escape the anger of God? Oh night, cover me! Oh seas, bury me!" Spitting upon his palms, he moaned quaveringly: "It was a lie! It was a lie!"

Looking up, many of the brethren forgot their own despair, astounded at what they heard. There was tremendous tumult, murmurs of reproach, anger, derision, and, above all, shrill and terrible, the laughter of Simplicianus the fool.

"Archippus hath brought the evil amongst us!"

"We are visited by a demon because of his sin!"

Epaphras, who had sought refuge deeper in the ship, made his way into the cabin. He shouted:

"Let it be done unto him as it was done unto Jonah! Let him be cast into the sea!"

The most uproarious applause answered from the demons riding on the dragons without.

Niobides silenced all with a look that was threatening and fearful. He seemed to magnify in stature in an access of austere wrath. White of face, grim, with imperious command he lifted his arm, his fist clenched. His eyes flamed with the old fire of holy battle and infuriated indignation.

"Speak not thus, brother Archippus! Speak not thus! Though the devils have laid hands on the souls of others amongst us who have defiled their couches with concupiscence, yea, though the infernal hosts ride in legions about us, I command thee, speak not thus. Yet 'tis not thou that speakest, but the demons that have charge of thee! Lift up thy soul, brother Archippus, and drive the lying devils from thy heart! Foul fiends speak through thy lips repudiating the miracle wrought upon thee by a gracious heaven! Demons would foully cast doubt upon that miraculous honor conferred from on high as a testimony of thy good works and for the glory of thy community and the exaltation of thy brethren. Speaking through thee, in an hour of weakness, Satan would cast reproach upon one of the most marvellous testimonials of celestial approval ever given for prayer, the expounding of the Holy Word and abstemious living! Though we have suffered the afflictions of all the hosts of hell, yea, though we have seen

Satan himself, this we will not suffer! Avaunt, Satan! Get thee gone!"

Archippus, insistent, protestingly tried to speak, but Niobides silenced him with an annihilating gesture.

"Lift up thy soul and pray that thou be delivered from the clutches of the Father of Lies! . . . Perilous is thy plight, Archippus! Lift up thy soul. . . . May the lying devils that possess thy tongue depart from thee!" And as Archippus, extending his self-accusing hands, still tried to remonstrate, Niobides furiously shouted as if to drown his voice:

"The devil speaks through thee—I will not hear him."

And, suiting the action to the words, Niobides, making the sign of the cross, tightly closed his palms over his ears.

Niobides prayed unremittingly. The storm abated and by dawn all danger was past. As the wind died, the courage of the monks revived. Gathering about their leader, the small band sank on their knees and, with faces buried in their palms from shame and contrition, asked pardon for all their transgressions of visions and dreams, and gave thanks that they had been saved, not only from death, but, what was infinitely worse, the perpetual company of fiends.

Under the stress of Niobides's exhortation the lying devils which had possessed Archippus, impelling him to repudiate the miracle in which his community so gloried, and which had proved such an incentive to pious endeavors, fasting, and flagellations throughout Egypt, departed, and, regaining heart in the truth, Archippus, lying upon his face, solemnly reas-severated the celestial authenticity of the stigmata. Even Epaphras sank on his knees with a gratitude and humility of spirit marked by all as being manifestly laudable.

"We have seen and heard strange things this night, brethren," spoke Niobides. "We have been carried on a ship amid legions of demons of too great number to imagine. We have heard them howl and laugh at us; yet we steadfastly bore these hellish taunts and insults and suffered not to surrender our souls. We have seen what few men are given to behold—Satan himself as a fiery dragon. But because of our

piety he was compelled to make haste from our presence, and for this we have to give thanks. We have heard on this very ship the laughter of that damned consort of Satan, that princess of fiends, Lilith. Some of you have confessed that this demon came to you in hours of full consciousness and that knowingly you gave yourselves. We can only pray that heaven will pardon you and that more rigorous penances than any experienced before may placate the just wrath of heaven. We know that the embrace of woman is accursed and to be shunned; as for the embrace of a fiend, for horror it surpasseth the imagination. It is unfortunate the holy fathers have not considered, in council assembled, a sin of such magnitude, so as to ascertain its relative enormity. We can but leave such as have sinned to the mercy of God. As for those who gave themselves to dreams, we know that the sins committed in dreams are venial, inasmuch as in sleep one doth not exercise the gift of free-will. We have heard some of you despair of the mercy of God, which the holy councils have decided is one of the sins against the Holy Ghost. Considering the trials to which you have been subjected, such a denial may have been involuntary and therefore not unpardonable. Peter denied Christ thrice and was forgiven. We have heard our brother Archippus, whose piety hath long been of sweet odor in the desert, deny the validity of the miracle heaven wrought upon him. Demons possessed him, and their voices, coming through his mouth, ye have all heard. That this thing was permitted is, I confess, confounding, and a matter for long meditation. Inasmuch as prayer routs the most formidable of Satan's hosts, these devils, under our exorcisms, departed. Archippus, overcome with remorse, hath prostrated himself and reaffirmed the divinity of that most admirable of all miracles. Let us keep our brother in mind when we pray, lest the demons of denial again return, and with sevenfold power. May his holy wounds flow afresh!

"Just why we have suffered what we have suffered it is not for us to inquire, nor for such worms as we to impugn the wisdom of the Most High. Keep watch and pray lest, having repented and being saved, ye fall again into sin and greater dangers befall. Perchance this storm was brought upon us

that such of you as had sinned might be driven to repent. We know that God sometimes permits Satan to work his will so that in the end He may be more greatly glorified. Thus it was when the devil afflicted the patriarch Job. Let us all pray, my brethren, that these manifestations of the Evil One may be followed by extraordinary marks of divine favor."

"Let us not forget, also," cried Galbus, in a shrill, squeaking voice, "the marvellous manifestation of heaven's favor to our holy abbot and sweet father. For did ye not mark that when he made the blessed sign of the cross, after the devils had so lyingly befouled our brother Archippus's mouth, there was immediately a marked deference in the demeanor of the winds? Verily, 'twas at the holy sign the storm began to abate, the waves were quelled, the winds went down, and the devils began to make their departure. This is as it should be. When I was in the desert with the holy Anthony in my youth I often observed the effect of holy formulæ and signs upon the elements—in fact, have myself sometimes been able to influence inanimate objects. I have seen the holy Anthony—who, praise God, is now in heaven!—make clouds obscure the sun at the sign of the cross and, by the same means, make them again disperse. That we have been saved from death and the monsters of the deep is due entirely to the prayers and the sign made by our good father."

Niobides spoke in reply:

"Thou hast perhaps observed rightly, brother Galbus, for I myself marked, at the moment whereof thou speakest, that the storm began to lull, and that as my heart rose in petition for our safety the demons departed. Let us go above and give praise."

The ocean was still rough and choppy, but the wind had lost its force—gods, demons, monsters had been put to rout. The tips of the blackish-green wave-crests ran with burning gilt.

"Alleluia! Alleluia!" exclaimed Niobides with joy. "Rejoice, my brethren! Those who sinned and suffered danger have confessed and are safe! Faith hath overcome doubt! And perchance in the calming of the storm we have been favored with a miracle. Our prayers have vanquished the demons of the storm! Alleluia!"

Niobides strode forward, exultant, when, with a terrified, whining cry, all threw themselves prostrate.

"The demon! The demon! He cometh from hell, riding upon the dawn!"

Looking toward the east, against the carnation-flaming dawn, Niobides beheld the adumbration of two monstrous horns. Formed by two upward-curling spiral columns of clouds, thick at the base and narrowing toward the tips, they rose from the horizon and reached midway to the zenith, standing out in distinct sinister relief against the ruddy sunrise, and appallingly dominating the sky. What he beheld to Niobides was unmistakable. The devil, ever alert—perhaps approaching—was peering over the ocean edge from the other side of the earth. As if his limbs were removed from under him, Niobides collapsed on the deck. Convulsed with an agony of misgiving and fear he cried aloud:

"Lord God, forgive me if in the accomplishment of my prayers I took a sinful pride and in the quelling of the storm found cause for too-vain rejoicing. Inexorable One, verily I know that in graces received there is danger of sinning by too great self-gratification, and that in Thy favor it is perilous, with any thought of self, to rejoice. Lord, Thou ever mockest the proud of heart, and the demon findeth means of ensnaring us even in our prayers and good works. Lord, be not relentless in Thine anger and give me not unto the powers of hell!"

Casting their ominous shadow on the shimmering sea, in silhouette against the blazing glory of the earth's sun, the two horns seemed to dilate in size and slowly move. . . . Taking courage now and then to peep fearfully upward, the brethren saw in the horrifying apparition indubitable and visible evidence of the ever-watchful presence of the Arch-Enemy of Man himself. Pathetic in their grovelling terror, their voices quavered through the ever-lightening gloom.

"The Demon! The Demon! Lord, our God, be merciful lest we have offended Thee by the sin of pride!"

Late that night Niobides stood at the prow of the galley long after, as he believed, his companions had retired. His spirit deeply troubled by all that had passed the night before

and the ominous portent in the morning sky, he found it difficult to compose himself to prayer.

The night was potent with beauty and with magic. The moon, blazingly effulgent in her early decline, flooded the sky. The stars were dim as pale peris' eyes. The air was silverily phosphorescent. An inebriating effluvia, fragrantly saline, exhaled from the waters and surcharged the atmosphere. Like a great bird, its white sails swelling, the galley soared through a world of eerie witchery. Far away—glittering through filmy mists of mother-of-pearl—appeared the mast-lights of vessels, and now and then, fugitively, the breeze wafted the echoes of sailors' voices raised in song.

A disquietingly tender plaint in these trailing echoes knocked insidiously at Niobides's heart; somehow, with a plangent longing, he thought of his childhood home in Carthage, his mother long dead, and brothers and sisters engulfed in the sinful maelstrom of the world. Unconsciously and quite involuntarily he responded to the dissolving glamour of the night. Lulled by the mesmeric lapping of the waves against the sides of the ship, he pleasurably relaxed; the disturbed perplexity of his meditations and troubled misgivings vanished in a restful apathy of body and of mind.

Giving his face to the refreshing and softly caressive breezes, he forgot, for once, in the insidious languor of the hour, the armor of prayer.

Mary, gathering her red mantle about her, stepped cautiously upon the deck.

Emerging from the dark, ill-ventilated retreat below, she breathed in the bracing salt sea air delightedly, her nostrils quivering. She extended her arms as if to embrace the very breeze. She gazed about searchingly; in the steering-house there was a light, but that was far in the stern. At the prow, alone, stood Niobides. Mary's eyes lighted with eager exultance. Her face framed a baleful anticipatory smile. Stealthily, silently, with the surreptitiousness of the prowling tigress, she glided forward in the shadows.

Gently laving the galley, the waves made the sound of kissing mouths. In the curdled waters in the trail of the ship

ran glowing lines of algæ-fire. Wisps of clouds, wafted by the breeze, crossed the sky, casting fantastic reflections on the burnished sea, and now and then obscuring the moon. Niobides likened these clouds to the triumphant banners of the armies of the Church militant marching into heaven.

To the poetical imagination of Sylvanus—who with Epaphras, Paul, Onesiphorus, Allamides, and a half dozen others quietly crouched in the shadow of the mainsail—the clouds resembled phantasmal women, with attenuated bodies and slender waists, whose naked limbs moved lithesomely in a lascivious saraband across the moon. Sylvanus tried to put these unchaste thoughts from him. Unable to sleep, and fearful of the temptations that endangered them, the party had softly stolen upon the deck so as to be near their spiritual leader, within the circle of whose devotions they experienced a reassuring sense of safety. Whilst they huddled together, some engaged in grateful prayer for their deliverance of the night before, others gazing blankly at the sky, a shadow appeared in the distance, and, assuming visible substance, swiftly glided past.

Clutching fearfully at one another, one and all rose to flee. But Epaphras, undismayed, stayed them with a fierce gesture. The fat monk crept forward, his right hand pointing significantly toward the prow. Craning their necks, their eyes riveted with terror, the group crawled after him, their gaze following the apparition.

“Behold,” whispered Epaphras, his eyes agleam with vindictive malice, “the demon that visited you!”

In the obscurity of the sail they crouched forward, their horror-fascinated gaze fastened upon the deck toward the bow. Like black silhouettes, the shadow forms moved forward and retreated, rose and fell. Nebridius, cringing fearfully away from his brethren, as if fearful of some inevitable discovery, fell limp on the deck, his jaws chattering. Epaphras hushed the moans and sighs of dismay and affright that rose with threatening gesticulations.

Standing at the prow Niobides prayed aloud:

“All-seeing God! Is there no escape from temptation?”

Eternal wisdom! Why hast thou filled the earth with evils as unescapable as the air we breathe into our lungs? Must we be ever tried—day and night? Is the spirit to know neither security nor rest? Woe unto me that for the space required for an apple to fall from the tree to the ground I forgot the dangers which constantly surround us! Verily Satan goeth about as a roaring lion, but more often is he silent and swift as the eagle!”

With both hands Niobides closed his ears. For with a start of horror he had suddenly realized that in the sound of the lapping waves, to which he had listened so pleasurably, there were infamous suggestions. Taken off his guard, evil had insinuated itself into his soul. Quivering with revulsion, Niobides sensed in the wind that fanned his face the loathly touch of infernal fingers. Neither here nor there, north or south, east or west, could he look without beholding the artifices of the Prince of Darkness; neither in the desert nor on the sea, by night or day, was he safe from the pitfalls of the Evil One. In the moon which had beguiled him he saw a potent instrument of Satan; for a moment he had felt its magnetic magic upon his senses, the malign influence of that meltingly soft and sensuous witchery which conjures unclean desires and had accomplished the soul's ruin of countless thousands. What was this enthralling panorama of swooning sky and burnished sea but an infernal fraud designed to allure and divert the soul from the contemplation of the only true reality of eternal things! In the distant songs of the sailors did not Satan speak, evoking memories of home ties and false affections—earthly vanities that cannot endure? And were not those who sang men who by their evil lives and their ignorance of the true faith were destined to burn forever in hell? Did he not well know—yea, too well to be deceived!—that this bewilderingly enchanting visage of Nature but masked a grisly and leering evil beneath; that the universe all about teemed with temptations only the more perilous because of their balefully beautiful guise? Like evil birds these thoughts came thronging about the heart of Niobides, and, lest he be further imperilled by the monstrous dangers all about, he resolutely closed his eyes to the wonders of world and sky.



"Niobides," spake a voice softly. And more loudly, but none the less sweetly—"Niobides!"

"Who calls?" he asked, dropping his palms from his ears and trembling.

A gasp of dismay arose from the monks crouching in the shadow.

"'Tis she! 'Tis she! The fiend ensnareth him," whispered Allamides, his teeth chattering.

"The fiend, *thou fool!*" Epaphras silenced him with a contemptuous gesture.

Like black wraiths rising into the moonlight, dark-hooded forms prowled forward along the deck, augmenting the group watching the fell scene before them from the obscurity of the shadow.

"Merciful God! Save us! The fiend enticeth the blessed abbot Niobides himself!"

"God be praised!—he struggleth! He will conquer her. . . ."

"Nay, she beguileth him . . . give him strength, Lord God! Hear us! . . ."

"He falters . . . he draws back . . . he speaks. . . ."

"He speaks not . . . the fiend enmesheth him in her sorcery—O God, God."

"He withdraweth from her."

"He falleth back. O Lord, deliver him not up to the demon! Lord, wilt thou cast us off? . . ."

"Can he not pray? Can he not save himself?"

"Hath he lost the power of old to banish demons by the sign of the cross? Blessed saints and all ye martyrs, give our holy father strength!"

One of the monks wailed softly:

"God! God! Our protection is gone from us! The succubus draweth him after her! He is lured by her spell . . ."

"Save him! Save him!" another sobbed. "He alone is our hope!"

"God help us! He ceaseth to struggle!—Our spiritual father goeth to perdition!"

Nebridius, his face shame-hidden on the deck, gnawed his

fists to keep himself from groaning aloud in fearful contrition and panic-remorse for all that he had wrought.

Silence gripped the monks in an anguish of excruciating suspense. They watched with bated breath.

"Almighty and most merciful God!— He followeth her! —She draweth him unto her! . . . He is lost—lost!"

A low whine of agonized fear arose as the two figures, moving to and fro, like black silhouettes on the forward deck, suddenly passed from the sight of the watching monks and vanished in the shadows of the sail of the foremast.

"He is gone with her—I do not see him!"

The moonlight silvered the vacant prow. The sails cast balefully veiled shadows across the moon-sheened deck. The sound of the monks' breathing was like the stertorous gasping of men in the agony of death.

The great boat shivered. The breeze whimpered in the rigging like the crying of a child. The clouds gathered substance in the heavens. The four sails of the galley respired like the white breasts of cyclopean birds.

"The moon hath the face of a woman," muttered Sylvanus in awe, his aghast gaze sweeping the heavens. "The clouds are like titan women reclining on couches. Their breasts are great as mountains. They move voluptuously."

"The wind sigheth with lascivious desire," breathed Alypius, the singer. "I hear demons moaning with iniquitous rapture in the wind."

The horizon palpitated with shimmering films of mother-of-pearl. In the zenith dim stars panted. Milky effluvia, like luminiscent miasmata rising from the water, crept through the atmosphere. Out of the waves fluttered hosts of white hands like Nereides' tapered hands, beckoning. In the trail of the boat long lines of algæ-fire, like fierily curdled sperm, were ejaculated over the sea. A sweetish saline aroma exhaled from the ocean. Teasing their nostrils, it insidiously distilled into the monks' veins, stinging and inebriating their senses.

"The devil hath encompassed us all in his net," quavered Onesiphorus. "Look! Look!"

In the sky whence he gazed Onesiphorus saw youths, white-limbed and chasing. Their hips moved; they reached out

desirous arms. They were like the accursed satyr-silhouettes on the lovely vases of the Etruscans that had enchanted his fancy in the evil days of his early youth. Before them fled a host of phantasmal maidens.

"The moon hath the breast of a woman," Sylvanus's voice shivered to a dull moan. "The demon hath carried away our blessed father. He is gone—gone! Whither is he gone with her? Woe! Woe unto us!"

"We are lost! We are lost! Our salvation is gone! Perchance she will also come for us——"

Moaning, all but Sylvanus and Epaphras fell on their faces, pitifully writhing in superstitious affright.

Sylvanus shrank back with an imploring whine:

"Blessed Athanasius! Anthony! Blessed Luke and all ye holy martyrs of the Serapium, pray for us!" The great mainsail of the boat, distended, heaved like the belly of a monstrous woman.

Leaping high in the sky, driven by the agitated breeze, a host of fantastic phantom shapes, in an access of satyriastic frenzy, crossed the heavens.

A low cry of blood-cold terror escaped Sylvanus's lips. The monks looked up, quailing. Even Epaphras shrank farther into the shadow, aghast.

Across the forward deck, brilliantly silvered in a sudden effulgence of moonlight, Niobides reeled back—back toward the balustrade—his right arm thrown across his bent face, his left rigidly and fearfully outstretched as if warding off some impending devastating horror. Looming above him, like an avenging fury, her eyes blasting, her countenance livid with an annihilating rage, her uplifted right hand trembling, gripping the air as if to hurl invisible lightnings, strode Mary. Dumbstruck, harrowed with fear by the horrid hissing wrath of her voice, the monks glared, listening in the shadow, petrified.

"Knowest thou me not?" she shrieked. "'Woman of Babylon!' 'Sewer of Alexandria!' Dost thou not remember me now? Hear me! Hear me who I am! I am Mary—Mary of Alexandria, whose fame reached over the seven seas!

Mary, lily of Bruchheim! Star of the Egyptian sky! I am the Mary thou didst bitterly pursue because I was a woman, and beautiful! Because I loved beauty, because I loved love! I am the Mary who saved thee from the flames! I am the Mary thou didst slander and calumniate, persecute with malice and unrelenting hate. Dog! Dog! Ah, thou rememberest me now!"

Towering over him as he cowered on his knees, her voice swelled with the shrill shouting menace of the tempest.

"Dost thou recall the foul obloquies and insults thou didst vomit upon me—thou and thy rabble? 'Mistress of abominations!' 'Woman in scarlet!' 'Mother of harlots!' 'Bitch of Bruchheim!' Dost thou remember, madman, calling fire from heaven upon my dwelling-place? Yea, thou didst hate me—I had power, I loved the beautiful, my life was fair! Dost thou remember thy visitation with thy rabble and soldiers? How thou camest to bring thy life everlasting? Oh, thou dog! Was the sight of me then not pleasing unto thee—yea, when I was spat upon, and buffeted and jeered by beggars, and my wrists were chained? Ha, Niobides! Thou wert the prophet, the purifier, the holy man! I was the cess-pool of corruption! My iniquities stank unto heaven! I was the rotting sore of Alexandria! Thou wert the man of God, scorning the love of woman! Thou wert the saint, revered more as a god than a man by thy pious ruffians throughout Egypt! I was the evil thing, the unclean creature, the debaucher of youth, whom thou and thy arrogant Patriarch were determined to destroy! Behold me now! Am I less strong than thou? Am I more foul than thou? Am I more base? Less chaste? Remember thy lies! I was the woman of the beast, Babylon, mistress of abominations! Dost thou remember, oh holy man, how thou didst demand that I be condemned—that I be crucified? That Alexandria be rid of its plague! That my body be thrown to the swine! Dost thou recall the howls of thy hyenas, the barking of thy jackals? 'As she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her!' 'Let plagues come upon her!' 'Let her be utterly burned with fire!' Thou wert triumphant then, Niobides! Sorceress and wanton thou called me—all that

was vile! I was flung into prison. Thou wert the crusader of righteousness and virtue;—I was the woman of sin. I was to be executed in the manner meted to the most vile! Thy holy work was done! But I escaped from prison, Niobides! Yea, only to find life more bitter than death! As I had been famed, thou and thy zealots plunged me to the depths of shame and degradation! As I had been loved and honored, I became a thing hated and accursed even among the vile! The day of my glory was over. Thy monstrous idolatry of slaves was victorious in Alexandria. I was undone, but not utterly! My fame and my name didst thou take from me—but the hope of my spirit thou couldst not destroy. Neither did I forget thee, Niobides, nor thy sanctity and contemptuous scorn.”

Her voice lashed the night.

“Ah! Amid abominations thy memory pursued me! Sleepless and hungry, the echo of thy words stung me as whips. Thou wert a man, and holy; I was a woman, the source of all vileness, the damnation of the world! Despised, abused, cursed, beaten, hounded, a fugitive, hiding like a rat, suffering, starving, I remembered thy braggart chastity as I remembered thy hate. Ah, Niobides, thus—thus did I love thee!”

She laughed wildly, hysterically.

“But the gods did not desert me! No, Niobides! Delicious gods! Inexorable, dependable gods! Unto me did they bring opportunity for testing the worth of thy proud piety, the reality of thy vaunted virtue! Oh, most holy man, therefore did I come unto thy galley. Therefore did I come unto thy brethren, and then unto thee! Ah, recall thy insults now! I was the cage of every foul and hateful bird! I was the sepulchre of uncleanness! I was the habitation of devils! Thou and thy vain-glorious crew were pillars of righteousness and strength! Yea, ye were the walls of the marching army of your God! I was Babylon the fallen, the harlot over whom you rejoiced when you beheld the smoke of her burning!”

Her voice became hoarse.

“Rejoice over me now, O blessed Niobides! Wilt thou not rejoice over me? Am I not the foul sewer of the earth?—

and thou eminent for mortifications and good works? Doth virtue not clothe thee as a white robe, O holy man? Yea, curse me now! Vomit forth thy odious taunts! Mock me! Jeer me! Curse me! Spit upon me! Stone me! Hold up thy insolent cross!"

Flinging out her arms fiercely, she cried:

"Behold me! Yea, I am the courtesan, I am the woman of sin! Well do I know that in much I was weak and bitter and acquainted with vileness. But thou—thou—oh thou coward, thou craven, thou hypocrite, deluding and self-deluded! *Thou dog . . . .*"

She paused, panting, her lips ashen, a cold dew of nauseous self-disgust and horror glistening on her forehead. . . .

"Oh, furious gods!" She smote her breasts. "Oh, what have I done? What have I done? . . ." Recoiling from the miserable victim, shuddering, sick—"Away from my sight! I loathe thee! I hate thee! I spurn thee! I spew thee from me! Thou—thou . . . thou . . . unutterable . . . monster!"

With a sob of sheer revulsion, she threw her mantle over her face and, dashing down past the shrinking monks, vanished into the bowels of the ship.

Grovelling, still on his knees, Niobides flung his body to and fro, forward and backward, in racking paroxysms of devouring despair, confounded fury, goading self-abasement and impotent raging rebellion—the agony and humiliation of the proud, undone soul self-hurled to perdition. He wrung and wrenched his hands heavenward, then beat them maniacally on the boards. To the monks, his children, glaring agape, transfixed, his debased degradation was inhuman in its abysmal ugliness; his face, in its contorted twistings, hideous, demoniac. From his convulsed lips his voice snarled:

"Almighty God, turn Thy face from me! I am dung on the face of the earth! Terrible God, I cannot bear the fury of Thy countenance! 'Twas in Thy service I was led astray; 'twas on thy paths I was led to destruction! I held my head high in Thy favor, only to be plunged in a deeper abyss of damnation! My pride hath overtaken me, and in the good

works wherein I gloried have I found defeat! I know Thee, O God! Thou art a bear lying in wait to rend him who is trustful of Thy favor! Thou art a lion prowling in secret places to devour him who is sure of his strength. Thou didst hate man from the beginning—yea, from that very hour Thou didst regret having moulded him with Thy spittle! 'Twas Thou madest him weak that he should fall! 'Twas Thou gavest him desires Thou didst prohibit that he might not escape Thy mockery! The precious blood of Thy Son hath failed to quench the intolerable thirst of Thine anger! Thou liftest man high but to fling him down! Thou rewardest man for his services only to blindfold him with pride and self-confidence to the dangers Thou hast prepared for him on every side. The world thou didst make Thou hast filled with pitfalls! Thy promises are snares to man's feet! There is no escape! Thou delightest in man's misery! His torments in hell are Thy terrible diversion! Be done with Thy hate, O malignant God! Hold me in suspense no longer! Let the sea devour me! Let the lightnings rend me! Wither my veins! Blast my heart! Let my liver be poured upon the ground! Be done with Thy malice! Strike me! Crush me in the winepress of Thy wrath! I have fallen as Thou hast designed! Let Thy will be done! Let hell engulf me! I know that in Thee there is neither mercy nor love!"

His nails clawed into his face until great drops of blood blotched his livid cheeks. Wallowing on the deck like an abject brute cringing from the stripes, his voice rose in a raucous, bitter, soul-rending wail:

"O mocking and fiendish God, I hear the hiss and gnashing of Thy teeth!"

## **BOOK THIRD**

### **THE REDEMPTION**

**"WOMAN, ARISE! THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN."**

**"NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE: GO, AND SIN NO MORE."  
JOHN 8: 11.**

**"HER DEATH WAS REPORTED BY THE MONK ZOZIMUS, OF  
THE COMMUNITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ON THE  
JORDAN. . . IT IS CREDIBLE TO BELIEVE THAT LIONS  
DUG A GRAVE FOR HER BODY."—ST. SOPHRONIUS,  
PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM. (?—VARIOUS DATES OF  
DEATH GIVEN, 421, 423, 511, 522 A.D.)**





## BOOK THIRD

### XVIII

THE anniversary of the discovery of the True Cross by Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, had become an occasion of world-wide rejoicing.\*

A timber of the Cross—the most august and venerated object in the Christian world—was enclosed in a casket of silver, covered with glass, which reposed in a shrine in the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. There, on the feast day, thousands of the faithful assembled to participate in the solemnities and to view the sacred relic. There were impressive processions, with patriarchs, presbyters, archdeacons, deacons and priests in resplendent robes, and monks in countless numbers—veritably the marching regiments of the army of God. Canticles and hymns were sung in all languages—Hebrew, Syriac, Egyptian, Punic, Coptic, Greek, and Latin. Of all diverse nationalities, races, and colors, those who assembled were one in the fold of the Church, for thus was the vision of Peter the Apostle, concerning the Gentiles who received the Word of God, fulfilled: "*And in a trance I saw . . . a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners . . . upon which when I had fastened my eyes . . . I saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air; and . . . the voice answered . . . 'What God hath cleansed call thou not common' . . . and all were drawn up again into heaven,*" as is written in the Scriptures. In such numbers did the faithful come that the streets of Jerusalem were congested and the inns jammed.

The city destroyed by Titus at this time teemed with a turbulent life as did no other metropolis on the globe.

The harbor of Joppa, the seaport of Palestine, was crowded with ships—galleys, biremes, triremes, and smaller seagoing craft. They brought pilgrims from Antioch, Syracuse, Constantinople, Rome, Cyrene, Corinth, Ephesus—from Mace-

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\* The feast of the exaltation of the Cross was instituted by Constantine, 325 A.D., about seventy-five years before.

donia, Illyricum, Dacia, Thracia, Gaul, Egypt, Arabia—from beyond the Hæmus mountains, the Indus and Oxus rivers, and the most remote regions to which the Word of Truth had penetrated.

Many made the pilgrimage as penance for grievous sins; more to obtain favors, earthly and spiritual; some for the renewal of diseased bodies; others for the purification and cure of sick souls. On the journey the pilgrims endured rigorous fasts, some, imitating the example of the ascetics, subjecting their bodies to painful mortifications. The rich quite often journeyed in ostentatiously cheap and humble garb, simulating poverty; it was not extraordinary to see a man of great wealth, moved by the spirit, exchanging his luxurious robes, embroidered with gold, for the foul rags of a beggar. All lines of caste were obliterated. Rulers of the earth, temporal and ecclesiastical—proconsuls, prefects, magistrates, patriarchs, presbyters, and priests—mixed with the most humble and participated in their prayers. Before his death, shortly before, the Emperor Theodosius pursued a policy which virtually made the profession of Christianity obligatory upon all holding office; therefore to the world's supreme Christian feast came those desirous of political preferment under Theodosius's successors. Ambassadors came representing Theodosius's sons—Honorius, who was now Emperor of Rome, and Arcadius, who ruled over the Empire of the East at Constantinople. These imperial delegations came in great state and brought sumptuous gifts.

The majority of the pilgrims brought offerings for the enhancement of the Church of the New Jerusalem—as the basilica at the Holy Sepulchre was named by Helena—the churches built by her over the cave where Christ was alleged to have been born at Bethlehem and on the Mount of the Ascension, as well as for the edifices erected by order of Constantine on the Mount of Olives and the Oak of Mambre, and for the innumerable other shrines of the Holy Land. The wealthy brought votive oblations of priceless value—carpets from Persia, hangings from India and Cathay, and Bactrian fabrics yellow as gold for the sanctuaries, costly vestments embroidered with the Lamb and the Book of the Seven

Seals; Byzantine eikons, censers, candelabra and ornately chased chalices of gold, jewelled crosses and life-sized statues of wax, colored skilfully, and clothed in sumptuous garments, representing the Virgin, apostles, and celebrated martyrs. The poor unostentatiously brought tiny images of saints carved of bone or wood by their own hands, pieces of embroidery, homespun linens, frankincense, candles, and meagre savings of coins. They were not disheartened, however inconsequential their gifts, for they knew the offering of the poor man in the sight of God is of more value than that of his rich brother; and, viewing the pilgrims noted for affluence in the countries whence they came, even to the dignitaries from the imperial courts of Honorius and Arcadius, the impoverished found consolation in the story of the widow's mite, repeating it among themselves.

For a week before the festival Joppa seethed with life and excitement. The narrow streets, between the low white houses, roared with the babel of the thronging multitude—Arabs, clothed in glaring striped shawls, Libyan mountaineers, Idumean shepherds, fair-haired Corinthians, swarthy Cyrenians, sturdy Illyrians, Celtiberians, barbarians in colorful and fantastic garb—Britons, Gauls, Iberians, Teutons, Byzantine nobles magnificently jewelled, converted Goths who wore the helmets of the legions and, despite the heat, the bearskin cloaks of their northern homes, and even Indians from Hindustan.\* Glossy, frizzled-haired negroes peddled fruits. In the street crossings athletes and acrobats gave exhibitions of their skill. At the corners of the thoroughfares Indian fakirs charmed snakes, made ivory balls disappear in the air, caused plants to grow instantaneously out of bowls of earth, and performed divers feats of legerdemain. From the wharves came camels bearing great bales and cedar chests, and long lines of asses, burden-laden.

Out of Joppa, from sunrise to sunset, poured the human stream. Beneath the glaring Judean sun the motley and fantastic colors of the garbs of the pilgrims, of camels gaily caparisoned, and of litters elaborately gilded and gaudily hung with Tyrian and variegated Smyrnian curtains, shimmered

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\* Jerome (tom. 1, p. 26) mentions Britons and Hindus.

with an intense kaleidoscopic brilliance. The procession, winding amid the arid spaces on the high-road leading to Jerusalem, resembled a monstrous mottled-colored snake. The ascetics, wearing garments of haircloth or sheepskin, walked barefoot, leaving behind them on the hot roadway blood-stained footprints. Recalling the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, some of the pilgrims broke off branches of palms, which they waved as they marched, singing psalters and psalms. Relatives bore their sick in litters or on improvised stretchers. Suffering every known malady—on the brink of death, the threshold of life everlasting—men and women came from over the seas, from beyond remote mountains, seeking miraculously to prolong the very mortal life which their religion taught them to despise.

Marvellous miracles, reports went, had been accomplished by the Cross. By touching it the sick had been made well, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and cripples had thrown away their crutches. By merely gazing upon it, and bathing in the effluent virtue it disseminated, many had risen from beds of affliction well and whole; epileptics had ceased to fall in fits, sterile wives, having endured reproach, after visiting the Cross and during their stay in Jerusalem, were fecundated. Now and then the stream parted and precipitately scattered. The cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" arose. And a leper, with eyes like red coals and a face like calcined lime, would thread his grim and loathly way in terrible solitude.

The actual proportion of pilgrims was hardly more than two-thirds of those included in the procession. Between the two towns was the moving activity of a city's life. Purveyors of food and wine accompanied the journey, driving donkeys laden with bread, millet cakes, cheeses, dried mutton, fruits, peaches, Shami apples, Sultani citrons, oranges, almonds, figs, and resin-covered skins of wine. Those of the pilgrims who did not journey fasting—and there were many whom the appetites of the flesh overcame—were served in the shade of palm trees by the roadside.

Whenever parties paused to refresh themselves by the way, the peripatetic entertainers became amazingly active. Divesting themselves of their garments, acrobats and gymnasts con-

torted on the turf. Their bodies, massaged with oil, gleamed like brown ivory. Garishly-garmented musicians played flutes, gingras, and harps. There were those who, wearing tinsel and rags, traversed the highway joyously, neither with penitence in their hearts for offences nor hopes for celestial favors—minstrel-singers, vagabond wights who gayly sang their way through the world, improvising songs or hymns for a few oboli, a crust of bread, a cup of wine. They mimicked the monks and penitents, composed satires on the miracles of the Cross, and otherwise scandalized the pilgrims.

In curious contrast to these were the Chaldean astrologers and Egyptian fortune-tellers who rode on mules and wore sombre robes embroidered with eldritch animals and the signs of the zodiac. With profound bows and faces of immobile gravity they audaciously offered their intangible wares to the faithful, but were invariably rebuffed. Among the pilgrims were hordes of prostitutes from all parts who came to Jerusalem to take advantage of the feast to ply their trade—common women who walked the roadway, and more elegant courtesans from Constantinople and Rome who rode in palanquins, gaudily arrayed. Ubiquitous, thicker than flies, swarms of mendicants haunted the highway. Knowing that the religion of the pilgrims glorified poverty and counselled the giving of alms, those who nursed their foul rags in lazy ease at some street corner the rest of the year became industriously sprightly; lame beggars found an amazing alacrity in their limbs; blind beggars were suddenly able to perceive clearly, deaf beggars to hear.\*

Thieves, vagabonds, and drunken loafers of the inns, who lived by whatever they could pilfer along the wharves of Joppa, becoming suddenly devout, joined the pilgrimage, beg-

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\* It might perhaps have been expected that the influence of the place . . . should have produced some salutary effects on the morals as well as on the faith of the people. Yet the most respectable of the ecclesiastical writers have been obliged to confess, not only that the streets of Jerusalem were filled with the incessant tumult of business and pleasure (Jerome, tom. 1, p. 103), but that every species of vice, adultery, theft, idolatry, poisoning, murder, was familiar. (Gregor. Nyssen, apud Wesseling, p. 539.)—Gibbon's "History and Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. ii, pp. 533 and 534.

ging with touchingly grieved and injured expressions on their unwashed faces. With hypocritical piety, these cunning wretches constantly reminded the prosperous pilgrims of the scriptural injunctions to feed the poor and help the afflicted. "Hath God not chosen the poor in this world?" they wailed. "Remember the poor! Hath St. Paul not said ye should remember the poor?" The pilgrims feared to refuse, for they knew that, to test the spirit of their almsgiving, angels often came to earth in the guise of the most lowly and wretched.

Among these knaves were certain ones of a nimble wit who invented marvellous fictions concerning the True Cross, and who, moving to and fro, regaled the pilgrims with accounts of extraordinary miracles.

"Alms, alms! Give unto the poor in spirit! Thou wilt see the Holy Cross and blessings will be showered upon thee. To gaze upon it is to become rich in grace. Alms! Alms!"

"Hearken, kind pilgrim! There was a certain woman in Carthage who was generous to the poor. She lost all her wealth and became afflicted with leprosy. Then came she hither on a pilgrimage to the True Cross, and on her way gave all in her purse, to her last oboli, to the needy. Lo! as she knelt before the Cross and wept her tears were changed to pearls!"

"Avaunt! Avaunt!" And a rival beggar, pushing the narrator aside, told a tale even more amazing.

"Dost thou desire a child, fair lady? Ah, remember the blessed Anne! There was a matron in Antioch who was past the age of three-score, childless, and still she yearned for a child to comfort her age. She was a reproach to her husband, and her days were filled with sorrow. Thereupon she visited the True Cross, denying no plea from the needy, and lo! she was made fertile! I swear by the gods—by the saints, I mean!—that she bore to her husband a family of children, verily five, equal in number to the divine wounds. In sooth, kind lady, a miracle! Alms! Alms!"

"Aye, aye, undoubtedly in sooth a miracle!" said the awed pilgrim.

Bending their heads to hear as they walked or rode, the pilgrims listened avidly, with bated breath. These ingenious

rascals fabricated the most amazing tales of miracles wrought by all the instruments of Christ's passion which Helena, through the industrious zeal of the clergy of Jerusalem under the former Patriarch Macarius, had discovered—these included the tablet of Pontius Pilate which had hung over the Cross, the crown of thorns, the lance, the pillar at which Christ had been scourged. All these marvellous relics the pilgrims would see—even to the nails used to crucify Christ on Calvary. For, singularly, although the actual nails produced by Helena had been sent to her son Constantine, who had them set in the bits of his bridle and on a helmet used in military expeditions, another set was still exhibited in Jerusalem. The inconsistency of the duplication never occurred to any single one of the pilgrims and nothing was too preposterous or grotesque not to be believed, for never did the clergy of Jerusalem refute even the most extravagant and fantastic legends invented concerning their treasures. The beggars regaled the pilgrims with stranger stories of the marvels worked by cups of the Virgin's milk in various shrines, and which, though distributed in small receptacles to favored and notable visitors who brought rich gifts to the Patriarch, were miraculously refilled.\* Thrilled with the thought that they were in the very land of prodigies and revelations, in which they hoped to share, whenever the beggars had finished, their desire for holy knowledge and the possibilities of the relics still unsated, the pilgrims would eagerly encourage the tale-tellers, "Say on! Say on!" These beggars received handfuls of coins.

It was the day before the great feast. Long before sunrise the procession, thicker, more congested than on any of the previous days, began to crawl through the gate of Joppa onto the highway toward Jerusalem. The pilgrims moved with slow solemnity. Groups joined in prayers. Bands chanted psalms. Sometimes long processions joined in the *Te Deum* of Ambrose—that splendid hymn of exaltation that first

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\* Erasmi Opera, tom. 1, p. 778, Ludg. Batav., 1703, in Colloq. de Peregrinat. Religionis ergo.



resounded in the bishop's church at Milan. The voices of hundreds pealed forth in ringing glorification:

Lord, who hast redeemed us by Thy costly blood,  
Kindle in our souls Thy heavenly fire!

Oh, help Thy saints, Thy servants and Thy heirs,  
That naught in life nor death may seek to sever  
Thy glory and Thy blessedness from theirs,  
Who hope to reign with Thee in heaven forever! \*

The sun rose radiantly over the bleak Judean hills. By degrees, as the orb mounted toward the zenith, a singular disturbance became manifest among the pilgrim procession. The winding, serpentine, crawling mass of beasts and men—camels, mules, horses, palanquins, litters, pedestrians, equestrians, multi-colored and various—slowly, and by degrees, became inexplicably agitated in its movement. Bands of horsemen, for no apparent reason, began forcing their way to the front. Camel-drivers, with loud oaths, casting affrighted glances backward over their shoulders, belabored their snarling, snapping mounts to quicken their gait. Palanquins, borne on the shoulders of negroes, tossed and toppled over the heads of the crowd as the bearers, urged on by the cries of those within, shoved their way through those making the pilgrimage afoot. Muleteers, leading patient beasts, the burden-bearers of the pilgrimage, their backs piled high with sacks and bales, jerked savagely at the bits as they strained forward in alarmed haste. Bands of monks, girding their robes above their knees, increased their solemn tread to a hurried pace. Their chants rose to a shrill quaver. Crossing themselves, many broke into a run. Pedestrians of all nationalities, men and women, the aged and children, infected by an eddying contagion of dismayed apprehension, ceased from the prayers, laughter, and song which had enlivened their journey an hour before.

Startled questionings passed from lip to lip, and as ominous rumors came from the rear, frightened groups pressed steadily into the fore of the procession, while others bulging out from the main road scattered forward over the fields. Here and there in the thickening *mêlée* angry cries of protest arose from the bearers of litters who endeavored to

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\* Translation after the original hymn as it was sung by St. Ambrose and St. Augustine.

stem the onrushing tide of humanity which threatened to overthrow and crush their helpless charges. Unnoticed, epileptics rolled over in fits and were trampled upon. Through the hubbub came the plaintive screams of the crippled and blind forsaken by their guides. Even the shunned lepers, fear of whom had given a free space in their pilgrimage, were shouldered and jostled along in the scurrying mass. Driven as by some unknown fell terror behind, from out of the Joppa gate, with frightened shrieks and yells of terror, poured a motley crew of Syrian dancers, prostitutes, their gaudy trappings all awry, musicians, throwing away their flutes and ginguas as they ran, lame beggars endowed with sudden alacrity, thieves, cut-purses, sailors, purveyors of food—all fleeing in a turbulent panic, unreasoning, desperate, utterly frantic. Outside the gate a group of acrobats abruptly stopped their tumbling, and, without donning their discarded robes, plunged headlong into flight. In an hour the entire procession—Christians, Jews, Gentiles, pagans, fleeing monks, peddlers, drunken sailors—had become a wild race as before a pestilence from Joppa—a mad, hysteric, whirling, uproarious stampede.

From tongue to tongue, rolling over the rout, gathering terrifying volume as it advanced, the ominous cry swelled into a clamorous chorus of maniac fright:

“The demon monks! The demon monks! The legions of hell in hair-cloth and hood are upon us! The sorceress of the Apocalypse is in their midst! Flee! Flee!”

In grisly silence, like a very host of the damned, out upon the pilgrim road marched the monks of Nitria. They walked in double file, their hoods thrown back, their hands no longer crossed in prayer upon their breasts. No hymns of praise arose. Before them loomed no cross. Nor were they led by Niobides, surnamed the Good, the most famed monk in all of Egypt.

Leaderless, dishevelled, unkempt, they grimly made their way, their gowns ungirdled, torn, and rent. About the necks of some, in mocking grotesque splendor, hung ropes of jewels. Others, hiccupping, their hairy garb stained and matted with the lees of wine, lurched and staggered as they marched. Even on the faces of these, blood-red and leering, was stamped a

fear like unto the fear of the hopelessly lost of hell. Their gruesome, fearsome silence was rent startlingly now and again by ribald peals of hollow laughter and maudlin fragments of song—only to break off abruptly each time, to split like the snap of a broken goblet stem. Each time one lifted his sodden voice, only to be choked by terror, the shroud-like livid faces of the others nervously jerked about, scared, apprehensive, tense, drawn. From all the faces, faces as cadaverous as the faces of the dead, faces as inflamed as the faces of the damned, stared protruding eyes, bloodshot, burning, ghastly as the dull, unseeing eyes of corpses which the souls have left.

Between the grimly sinister marching files paced a string of asses laden with the remains of the treasure of Philamon brought from Alexandria. While this had been unloaded from the galley at the docks of Joppa, Niobides, distraught with shame, undone, unable in thought to face the holy Patriarch of Jerusalem, the guardian of the Cross, had fled, taking with him Galbus the eldest, Simplicianus the fool, Paul the humpback, and a motley few who had preserved themselves amid the perils of the voyage.

Epaphras and Archippus had taken charge of the treasure—chests containing caskets of priceless jewels and vessels of gold and bales of rich fabrics. These, including antique Babylonian tapestries intended for the Church of the Sepulchre, jewelled vestments sent as gifts to Judean priests, gold-encased eikons and linens for altars, were disposed of in Joppa to traders. The massy vessels of gold and silver were converted into money, which the monks, casting dice, divided among themselves. The jewels, excepting those with which a few had fantastically bedecked themselves, were carried in chests on the backs of mules.

With this wealth the demoralized monks, vaguely and without set purpose, determined they should travel far, and, leaving the Holy Land, go elsewhere than Egypt, so as to escape punishment for their sacrilegious theft. Freed from their unnatural life of mortification and denial, with its fearsome mental repression and superstitious terrors, the cenobites after the *débâcle* on the galley, after the blasting disillusionment concerning their own sanctity and strength and the

greater virtue of their leader, the revered Niobides, were swept away in an insanely unbalanced emotional reaction—an epidemic hysteric mania in which they recklessly repudiated all that had been sacred, all in which they had believed. In their obsession they denied God, Satan, heaven and hell, and all virtues of chastity, abstinence, and mortification. Unable, however, to free their weak minds of a haunting, persistent fear of impending retribution, as soon as they disembarked in Joppa they sought to drown their misgivings in wine, in a reckless, sickening debauch.

As for Niobides, some believed he had followed the example of the Iscariot and hanged himself; others more logically conjectured that he had fled with his still-faithful disciples to the Judean wilderness, there to bury his shame from man.

Of all, Archippus alone preserved sufficient self-command to marshal the disorganized brothers for their trip to Jerusalem. They went forth with unholy purpose, reckless, desperate, driven by unconquerable terrors and fears, with a forced hilarity—in their journey making a dire travesty of their own damnation.

Leading the mule train, between his marching companions, rode Epaphras, a bedraggled wreath upon his bald head, rolling to and fro in a sodden stupor. His face was swollen, and from his half-closed eyes dripped whimpering tears. Behind him, leading a mule, stumbled Nebridius, his soul racked with the catastrophe he had brought upon his brethren. Last of all came Archippus, tall, gaunt, terrible, his deep-sunken eyes burning like coals. Before him he held up his wounded palms. Now and then, over the heads of his motley companions, shrilled his congealing, mockful laughter. And ever as this raucous mirth shook him, he glanced fearfully behind, his outspread palms quivering as if obsessed and driven by some pursuing wrath.

Some distance behind, as if holding this sinister slow-moving band in the reins of a baleful spell, as if driving them forward to some unknown destination by the very curse of her haunting inexorable presence, herself enshrouded in a sombre gloom of spirit, Mary rode upon an ass.

In the appalling wreckage of these men—far surpassing

in its dissolute demoralization all her revengeful anticipations—she found neither justifying triumph nor any appeasement of vindication. Rather than exultantly rejoicing in their sodden abandonment, their shameful licentiousness, their shocking blasphemy, their apostasy to all which they had revered and which she had despised, a vast disgust, a nameless numb revulsion, mingled with an abysmal self-loathing, overcame her. To what end had she gone among these men? To find beneath monkly habits the same nature as that clothed by tunics; to discover that, whatever their pretensions, men were ever prone to weakness and nauseous sensuality, ever condemning and despising—while they sought and succumbed to—the pleasure of women! Instead of exulting in this, her catastrophic reprisal, Mary experienced only an overwhelming sense of utterly devastating defeat. Defeat, yea, and for these monks, instead of the gratified triumph of appeased hate, she felt only a keenly bitter and sick contemptuous pity. More than all, the shameful self-detestation in realizing her own supreme defilement, the futility and shocking baseness of it, pressed down upon her as a hand of iron. An infinite, unformulated grief gnawed within her heart. Riding after the monks, as if herself gripped by the baleful spell of the horror, Mary felt herself abysmally alone; isolated from all mankind, desolation closed in and imprisoned her spirit like a wall. Her eyelids were heavy; her heart was weary. Something hurt her in her breast. Once one of the monks, Onesiphorus, fearfully spoke to her, offering a gourd of wine. There was something forbidding in the imploring reproach of her eyes, the austere sadness of her silent refusal. Thereafter none approached her.

Eerily wan, Mary's face was as luminous, as cold as mountain snow. Beneath her eyes were darkling rings; her lips were pale. The ass Mary rode was milk white, caparisoned with a net of gold, and from the bridle bits tinkled silver bells. She sat upon silken cushions. From their stores, before leaving Joppa, the monks had given her new garments—a tunic of linen, immaculately white and chaste as the hands that made it; a girdle of gold and a mantle of lustrous silk light as sea-foam, of a blue pale as the skies lined with a diaphanous fabric of the color of coral, and embroidered along the hem with

small diamonds and pearls in a spangled maze of stars. These garments had been made, while they prayed, by the white sisters of one of the convents on the Nile, and were intended to clothe a celebrated wax statue of the Virgin in the church built by Helena over the birthplace of Christ at Bethlehem. The mantle floated and billowed softly behind Mary as she rode; on her feet were sandals of gold, embroidered by the nuns with carnation-colored roses, and designed for the pure feet of the Virgin. From the treasures appropriated from the ship the monks had loaded her with jewels, the contents of entire caskets, gifts sent by Philamon for the enhancement of altars and holy statues.

About Mary's neck was a collar of lustrous pearls, pale rose in hue, and of the size of filberts which was said to have belonged to Poppæa, wife of Nero; over her bosom were strung ropes of emeralds, diamonds, and rubies. Upon her arms were hoops of ebony and gold set with carbuncles, topazes, sapphires, and amethysts; on her wrists bracelets of chalcedony, beryl, and jade. Her fingers were incrustated with irid-gemmed rings. In her ears were fastened dragon-flies with purple-green wings. These treasures in their time had belonged to empresses and courtesans, and were of incalculable value. In the sunlight they blazed resplendently. The spangled stars on her blue mantle scintillated rays of argent fire.

Mary rode on as the hours passed, her shoulders bowed beneath her wondrous mantle as with the crushing weight, the unutterable weariness of some intolerable burden. Now and then, as a flower wilted by heat, sighing deeply, her head drooped upon her breast. Aghast with horror and immitigable disgust, Mary looked up now and then, only to behold the shocking crew ahead, her victims, their hideous shame the work of her designing, their repulsive demoralization the tribute to her hate. With a tearless heartache, a haunting anguish, her soul, as if straining to break its mortal shackles, visibly ached through her great eyes toward the unencompassed freedom of the skies.

Toward nightfall, pausing at the top of a hill, Mary gazed upon Jerusalem—Jerusalem, the pride of Judea in its glory,

now desolate and ruinous in its fall; Jerusalem—the city to be marked throughout all ages as that wherein the most beautifully tender and divine of the sons of men had brought the message of world-redemption by love unto the earth; the city that was to be remembered for all time as the scene of the supreme tragedy of truth and genius enacted upon the planet.

The sun had just set.

Upon the same hill where the weary feet of the Saviour of Mankind had walked, paused Mary the courtesan—she whose infamies had been blazoned throughout the world and who was of all women the most notorious of her time.

Around her in the gathering twilight rolled an illimitable expanse of scrofulous hills. Black, blighted as by the searing bolts of Titans, the land lay devastated—a region of death and the dead. The very earth seemed afflicted with a hideous leprosy, and over the scarred ridges strata of calcined rock stretched like outreaching spectral arms.

Across a valley, from which rose a noxious black vapor, Jerusalem lay. The deep carnelian after-glow of the sunset was like the reflection of a mighty conflagration beyond the world. Against the spectrally lurid sky, in sinister relief above the city, loomed the ruins of the Temple, an inchoate tumult of smoke-scorched marble. Yonder, like a black finger pointing toward the zenith, a crumbling pillar was all that remained of the judgment hall of Pontius Pilate. An irregular oval hulk—the ruins of a stone wall, in which two holes bore testimony to the catapults of the armies of Titus—was all that was left of the sumptuous palace of Caiaphas, the high priest, wherein he had counselled that a certain Nazarene seditionist should die. The wall, with the red sunlight flaming through the two holes like gory eyes, resembled a monstrous skull. There were stretches of characterless ruins overgrown with funereal lichens; split and pocked columns, heaps of demolished masonry, sooted by fire or bleached white by time, and about the city, broken, battered, crumbling to dust, the once formidable wall. A few palm trees stood motionless against the sky.

Gazing upon the city, Mary experienced a swift, sharp pang, as of a knife thrust, in her heart. Strangely, inex-

plicably, the desolate panorama of barren hills and starved olive gardens, with the city looming afar, suddenly seemed as familiar to her as the place of one's childhood beholden after a long lapse of years. In all her life she had never been to Judea; yet the land seemed neither new nor strange—even the configuration of the hills fitted the outlines of the picture that in an instant had flashed in her deeper consciousness. Troubled by an undefined perplexity, she tried to gather the strings of her memory; but why this should be she could not fathom. With this baffling impression a wistful melancholy filled Mary's heart, something akin to the plangent homesickness of one afar from places of tender association. Yet, whatever the cause, it was vague, unplaced—the dull ache of a sorrow prolonged beyond remembrance. Mary experienced simultaneously a renewed sense of some immense, some crushing loss—yet the loss of something, she knew, either unremembered or unpossessed; there was a glimmering recollection of the closing of a great blackness about her in the past. She almost stifled in the very thought of it.

“Verily, something afflicts me,” she told herself. “Perchance an illness comes upon me. Have I dreamed of this country before? By the gods, 'tis as gloomy as Hades! Where can I have seen the like of this land—and yonder city—and the hill to my left with the olive trees? Strange . . . Strange . . . This country hath the effect of a witch's philtre!”

The devouring solitude of the region filled her with a sort of terror. Oblivious of the gloom of the landscape as well as the sanctity of the scenes about, the debauched monks had gone steadily ahead. They vanished in a defile leading to the valley where spectral blue-gray miasmas, like uncoiling wraiths, slimily spired from the ground. The greenish-gray twilight merged into a sombre purple darkness that enfolded the earth like a pall. The last-quarter moon had not yet risen, and between rifts of clouds rising from the horizon stars—white, golden, pale green—began to glitter over the Mount of Olives. In the west where the sun had sunk a gash of crimson glowed like a great death-lamp. Not far away from where Mary paused was a low promontory overlooking an ugly gulch,



the rocky face gutted with indentations resembling the cavities in a skull.

Absorbed in her depressed reverie, Mary sat upon the ass, gazing upon the city, where lights began to glow, for a long, long time, in utter silence, alone.

"Knowest thou, lady, on yonder hill the Lord Jesus was crucified?"

Startled, Mary turned and in the dusk observed a lad in ragged garments, smudged with soil—a farm boy evidently, who, she surmised, sought to profit from the generosity of pilgrims by volunteering information. His face, upraised, was earnest, his glowing eyes ingenuous and sincere.

Looking in the direction indicated, Mary observed a cliff looming in the purple dusk, its indented face like a gaping skull. A palpable chill rose from the ground thereabout, the darkness seemed to thicken nebulously over the hill, the air to stir uncannily as with invisible presences. The place was grim, ghostly—there hung over it an aura of agony and death.

"So that is the hill where the Nazarene carpenter was put to death," she muttered. "Verily He hath since revenged Himself upon His enemies! Who art thou?" she asked, turning to the boy, grateful in her lonely depression for his companionship.

"I am Bartemas, son of Elymas, who readeth the Scriptures in the Church of St. Jude the Apostle. Needest thou a guide, lady?"

Mary smiled.

"Whither wouldst thou guide me?"

"I know all the holy places in the city and without, lady, and I know the Scriptures by heart. For many years my father hath conducted pilgrims through Jerusalem and the country hereabout, describing the places which our Lord visited and reciting the accounts of His sayings and miracles as given in the Gospels. My father hath a small olive orchard yonder, and also raiseth wheat; but the fields are poor, lady, and the profit small. During the feasts I now help my father in guiding visitors to the sanctified places mentioned in the Scriptures. I can show thee the Pool of Bethesda, the house

of Nicodemus, the places where our Saviour healed the blind man and where He protected the adulteress from being stoned. I know also the house of Veronica, who wiped our Lord's face, and of Mary Magdalene, who washed his feet with tears. I can take thee everywhere—even to Capernaum and Bethlehem if thou wouldst go. Yonder, to our left, is the Mount of Olives—thou canst just see Gethsemane. Wouldst thou have me guide thee thither on the morrow?"

"If thou wilt, my lad, thou canst guide me to the inn where I would stop to-night." Mary's voice was weary. "I am not interested in thy places of exhibition."

"Come then," said he, taking the bridle. "But all the pilgrims, lady, visit the holy places."

"Child, I am not a pilgrim."

"Hast thou not come to do penance for thy sins and to venerate the Cross?"

Mary laughed—her laughter was bitterly ironic.

"Neither," said she.

"Art thou not a Christian?" The boy gazed at her with naïve surprise.

"No," answered Mary, "I am not a Christian."

"Dost thou not believe in Jesus crucified?"

There was a haunting appeal in the boy's voice—awed, soft, tender. He drew near, as if drawn to Mary by an unconscious sympathy. And he added:

"Dost thou not know that Jesus died for thee?"

Mary would have laughed—she would have laughed at such a question in Alexandria—but something in the innocent child's words, something in the atmosphere of this gruesome land, killed the hard mockery in her breast.

"That, my little friend, is something I do not know. To the contrary, I thought He was killed on a gibbet for preaching sedition, trying to set Himself up as king in opposition to the Romans, and to found an empire ruled by workingmen and slaves. How, therefore, could He have died for me? I am told He hated the wealthy, despised women, condemned as sinful everything that was beautiful, and inspired His followers to persecute all who did not believe what He taught."

The lad was confused.

"Thou speakest strangely, lady. Jesus taught none of these things. Jesus taught the forgiveness of sin and died that all men might be saved."

"But how did He die that men might be saved?" she yawned softly.

"Hast thou not heard? Have the elders and priests never taught thee?"

"Nay," said Mary, recalling her father and his friends, "they never taught me anything excepting that unless I be plunged into a tank of water I should burn forever in their Hades, and that if I loved I should be flogged and stoned."

"Our Lord always forgave," said the child. "Therefore should we love Him. Knowest thou not He mixed with publicans and sinners, and Himself said He came to judge and punish no man."

"Thou art young, little friend," said Mary. "I have been flogged, I have been stoned, I have been judged and punished." She regarded the vague figure in the dusk curiously. "Tell me," she asked, "what hast thou been taught concerning this Jesus?"

The child's eyes lighted with ardor and love, and, raising his head, he breathed softly:

"Jesus Christ was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God. Because He spoke the truth and taught men to seek the kingdom of God, He was hated by the Scribes and Pharisees and was put to death."

"Ah! Thou hast said it, boy—He tried to found a kingdom."

"Thou dost not understand, lady," the boy pleaded earnestly. "His kingdom was not of this world. For when He was brought before Pontius Pilate He Himself said, 'My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.'"

Mary shook her head with impatience.

"But they do fight, my child, they do fight—and bitterly.

I have heard the streets of Alexandria thunder with howling mobs of monks out to do murder! Why should this be unless their God commanded them? The Patriarch of Alexandria hath declared that it is his purpose to establish Christ's kingdom in the city. Is his power not of the earth?"

The boy was puzzled.

"Lady, I know not concerning these things. I know only that Jesus Christ taught men to seek first the kingdom of God, to help the oppressed, to forgive sinners, and to love one another as He loved them. Our Lord told us not to lay up treasures on this earth, where the moth and the rust corrupt, but in the kingdom where the treasures of good works remain forever."

"Where, then, if not in Alexandria, or Rome, or anywhere upon the earth, is this marvellous kingdom?"

"As is written in St. Luke, Christ said: 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" For behold the kingdom of God is within you!'"

"Verily, that saying is extraordinary for a carpenter," Mary mused; "for in his philosophy Plato declared that truth exists only in abstract beauty; Marcus Aurelius, too, counselled us to cultivate the virtues of the spirit within. Nevertheless, such is not the philosophy of Theophilus of Alexandria, nor is the kingdom of the heart and spirit that sought by his deacons and monks. Thou sayest Christ taught this thing?"

"Those are His words, lady!"

As they proceeded over the road Mary's thoughts moved quickly. In the distance before them the lights of Jerusalem appeared.

"But tell me, child, if Christ did not teach patriarchs to extirpate pagans and establish a kingdom on the earth for the benefit of eunuchs, slaves, laborers, and outcasts, such as constitute the Christian mobs in Alexandria, what then did He teach?"

"He taught men first to love and serve God and to love their neighbors as themselves."

"All the gods have demanded devotion and have sought

offerings and attention, many inspiring fear and terror," she said half aloud, disregarding the boy. "They did not seem so particularly desirous of affectionate consideration as of weak-kneed terror. None taught us to love our neighbors. That is a new and singular precept."

"Christ taught us to forgive those who wronged us as we would be forgiven of the wrongs we do."

"Ah, to forgive those who have wronged us!" She breathed to herself. "'Tis a simple way, and wise, in disposing of all hurts. We have learned only to return hate with hate, scourges with scourges, and to retaliate to a ten-fold degree for what we have been made to suffer. The dregs of the cup of hatred are bitter. I wonder if perchance forgiveness is sweet. Our philosophers did not expound this thing—to love one's neighbor: that is indeed a new precept in the world. Verily, 'tis an open window letting sunshine and light and the song of birds into the darkened house of life. To forget wrongs—and be at peace. How wise indeed! For, as I know, the desire for revenge is as a whip, tormenting one day and night; the fruit of vengeance is an apple that turneth to ashes upon one's lips." Addressing the boy, "What thou sayest thy Christ taught is wise beyond philosophy, and so simple and true it captivates the heart." She pondered deeply, then asked:

"But certainly, child, Christ hath commanded His followers to kill the Arians! Thus they say themselves."

"Who are the Arians?" ingenuously asked the child. "Jesus said: 'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.'"

Mary—within herself—experienced an exaltation, a glowing sensation as if she were bathed in light, intense and golden.

"This man," she murmured, "was a philosopher beyond all philosophers. Yea, to love and to forgive—that is a new and strange code in the world." And for a while she was silent.

"Look!" exclaimed the boy. "Far yonder, to the left of the city, is the Mount of Olives—there is the Garden of Gethsemane."

"Gethsemane," Mary breathed, again curiously depressed—"what is this Gethsemane of which thou speakest?"

In the hazy penumbra veiling the earth Mary could see only the dark hump of a hill in the distance far ahead.

"'Twas in Gethsemane Christ wept alone the night before He died!"

"Wept? Wherefore did He weep?"

"He did not weep for Himself, lady, nor because He had to die. But He loved all mankind and knew all the evil and unhappiness which men should bring upon themselves and from which, although He died, He could not save them. Thus His spirit was filled with grief."

"Thou sayest this man, or God, loved all the world? Perchance He loved His followers. But surely thou must be mistaken in His teachings, my friend. Certainly He did not include in His love those who believed not in Him, women and courtesans! For did He not condemn the love of women? And did He not hate women? Did He not first send forth monks and their mobs to stone all women given to love, to plunder their houses and cast them into prison?"

The lad came to a dead stop in the roadway.

"Hast thou not heard the story of Mary Magdalene?" he asked, with eager seriousness. "Surely, lady, thou canst not believe such grievous falsehoods! Our Saviour loved all men and women, especially the weak and the fallen. Surely thou knowest He went among the publicans and sinners, and prevented the Jews from stoning the woman taken in adultery? Those who truly believe in Jesus cannot do what He forbade."

Mary's hands went to her heart.

"Child, I was stoned. I was cast into prison. But I would hear of this Mary Magdalene—who was she?"

"Mary Magdalene was a great sinner," said the boy, softly. "She knelt at the feet of Jesus when He died. Her sins had been many, and they were forgiven; for she had loved much. It was to this same Mary the Lord first appeared three days after He died."

"Thou sayest this woman was a great sinner. But did the disciples of Christ not mock her? Did they not stone her?"

"Thou seemest verily to know little of the Lord Jesus," said the boy, half sadly.

"I would know more," said the woman, tensely. "Tell me—what more dost thou know of this Magdalene?"

"The story," replied the child, "is written in the Gospels. My father taught it unto me—it hath been my lesson oft. Shall I say it unto thee, lady, as I remember it?"

"Yea," murmured Mary. "I would hear this tale."

Then, in the thickening dark, to this world-acquainted woman, as if repeating a lesson by rote, in his simple way, the child told that most tender of all stories in the world—the story of God's divine understanding, God's all-wondrous compassion. From the lips of a child—innocent of the world and in the remoteness of a Judean farm ignorant of the ecclesiastical intrigues and political warfares of the Church—Mary heard her own story of the eternal woman and her quest of love; verily, of all who seek for some spiritual passion beyond the flesh, the story of woman's yearning, her disillusionment, her despair, withal her indomitable hope; in sooth, the story of all women who love but to be mocked and abased, who trust but to be deceived, who surrender themselves, with all the generous and tender devotion of their nature, but to be despised and contemptuously condemned. From the lips of a child Mary, the courtesan of Alexandria, heard the verdict of God upon woman's century-old trial before the prejudiced tribunal of men—the divine repudiation of men's injustice to woman and men's lubricious defilement and hypocritical stigmatization of the instincts and the nature God gave. She heard, in simple words, the divine vindication of that which—albeit perverted and prostituted—is the supremely divine and transfiguring thing in human life—the glorious gift of loving, even though variously and much.\*

And while she listened, deeply marvelling, to the child's

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\* "And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, . . . and stood at His feet behind Him, weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment.

"Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it he spake 'him himself, saying, 'This man, if He were a prophet, would have

naïve rendering of the ineffable story, Mary comprehended—with simultaneous flashes of memory—all her life; she recalled the father who had flogged her and whom she had tortured to death; the Christians who had stoned her, and the awful holocaust of victims at the Serapium; she heard the taunts of the monks who had reviled her and was again thrown into prison; then she thought of the shocking episodes on the galley, and the hideousness of her insult to the faith of the Nazarene. She had been wronged and she had revenged herself. Yet this Man, worshipped by those who had persecuted her, had told men to love their enemies and to forgive all wrongs. He had protected the woman whom all men despised, and had exonerated her of that for which men held her up to shame. Listening to the boy's words, not far from the hill of Golgotha where Christ had died, a first glimmering of the wondrous truth of God's all-embracing love, a faint first understanding of men's carnality and spiritual blindness, came to Mary. And of joy, awe and remorseful sadness a mist of tears filled her eyes.

Beyond, as they proceeded, they heard the sound of pilgrims singing as they marched through the streets of the Holy City.

"There is another story in the Gospels," pursued the boy.

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known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.'

"And Jesus answering said unto him, 'Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee.' And he saith, 'Master, say on.'

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

"And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?'

"Simon answered and said, 'I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.' And He said unto him, 'Thou hast rightly judged.'

"And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, 'Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

"Thou gavest me no kiss, but this woman since the time I came hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

"My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment!

"Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

"And He said unto her, 'Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.'—Luke vii.



"A woman taken in adultery was brought before Jesus in the Temple. And the scribes and Pharisees said unto him, 'Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. What sayest thou?' Jesus said unto them, 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.' And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one. And Jesus was left alone with the woman. He said unto her, 'Woman, where are thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?' She said, 'No man, Lord.' And Jesus said unto her, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.'

"This, lady, is the truth. Christ always loved and forgave sinners—He never condemned. Surely, lady, thou hast never heard of the Lord Jesus aright. Otherwise thou wouldst love Him."

Out of the zenith, at that moment, a pale sapphire meteor burst like a jewel of flame, and in the twinkling of an eye smote the heavens, dazzlingly, swiftly, silently. For a moment it lighted up the sky with a silvery-blue radiance bright as moonlight; in an instant it was engulfed in the firmament. In the brief silvery-blue glare Mary saw in the distance the great gilded cupola of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, and on the apex thereof the world's supreme symbol—the invincible, victorious Cross.

There were flutterings as of birds' wings within her breast.

"What thou hast told unto me is verily marvellous and strange," she breathed to the lad as they went onward toward the city gate. "Verily, never heard I thus of Christ in Alexandria."

It was at the Inn of the Lord's Supper.

Because of its widely-exploited reputé as having been the scene of Christ's last repast with His disciples, this caravan-serai had become one of the largest and most prosperous in the East. Whether the claim that Christ had instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion there was true or not, none ever questioned the assertion, and thousands of pilgrims annually visited the inn. On the occasions of feasts it was overcrowded.

The inn-keeper, with unctuous solemnity, displayed the table of the Last Supper, the stool on which Christ sat, the places occupied by John, Judas, and the other apostles. He even produced the basin wherein their feet had been washed. He had at his tongue's end the most extravagant tales concerning miracles that took place in the chamber—of the deaf being made to hear, the blind to see, the sick made well. At times food was said to appear miraculously on the table. For whatever they ate there, however, the pilgrims paid exorbitantly; but, as they were eager to hear about and to see wonders, the inn was richly patronized. The proprietor was a Jew.

When Mary arrived at the inn she found the courtyard crowded. Camel and mule drivers, unloading their charges, cursed the pertinacious beggars that swarmed about. Along the terraces, lighted by torches, peddlers sidled among the guests, insistentlly offering their wares. To the more ignorant of the pilgrims they sold, in great quantities, alleged splinters from the true Cross. An acrobat performed in a cleared space in the courtyard. In the various chambers guests were partaking of supper and drinking wine. Some employed musicians for their entertainment; others, mountebanks and dancers. The hostelry rang with uproarious activity.

In the chamber of the Holy Supper the monks had ordered a banquet to be spread. Epaphras was impatiently pacing the terrace, loudly calling for food and wine, when Mary, accompanied by her guide, entered the courtyard.

"Stay me with flagons! Comfort me with apples! By the beard of St. Anthony, I hunger! The prospect of food is as the joy of the blessed! Methinks my stomach sings the Song of Solomon! 'Tis eight years since I tasted meat!"

Archippus was shouting for the proprietor:

"Hasten, thou sluggard! Thou one-legged turtle, think-est thou, because we were monks, we have lost our bellies! Wine, ye snails! My throat cracks! Bring us wine!"

Seeing Mary alighting from her ass, Epaphras hailed her:

"Thou art come, my beloved! Thou art come! Behold thou art fair, my love! Behold thou art fair! Thou hast dove's eyes! Methought thy ass had sprained its ankle! But thou art here! Therefore, while these dotard cooks prepare our meal we can feast upon thee with our eyes!"

"I am weary, and I thirst," said Mary faintly. "I would have water." She gazed about, distracted, dazed. The scene seemed unreal as a nightmare. She felt ill and oppressed. In the glare of the torches her jewels encompassed her in a glittering nimbus; pilgrims, camel drivers, and beggar boys came near to stare at her.

"Where is this knave of an innkeeper?" shouted Epaphras. "What doth he mean by serving such wine? 'Tis as sour, I swear, as the temper of Theophilus! By the bones of all the martyrs, I have had enough sour wine in the holy sacraments! Why doth this cousin of Judas not give us honeyed wine? Have we not money wherewith to pay? Bring the innkeeper!"

A knot of monks appeared at the doorway. Sylvanus and Allamides rushed forward.

"Come, the supper is served! Archippus! Hasten! Ho, Epaphras! Let us eat! A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry! He that hath a merry heart hath a continual feast! Hasten! Our hunger hath come from Africa! Our thirst springeth from the sands of Nitria!"

Seeing Mary, they hailed her with uproarious enthusiasm, calling the others.

"Tarry not, fairest among women! With thee at the head of the table we shall banquet on a mountain of spices!"

Too weary to resist, too indetermined to formulate any wish of her own, Mary let them lead her, their voices drowning one another in inebriate hilarity, across the terrace. At the doorway she paused and, taking from her girdle the purse of golden coins which the monks had given her after the sale of their precious vessels to the goldsmiths, she flung it to the boy who had timidly followed, staring with curious wonder after her.

"There; go thy way, child," she called. "If thou wouldst be happy, stay among thy vineyards and fields; if thou wouldst preserve a precious fable—or perchance the truth—concerning a noble and wise man, remain away from the great cities of the world, from monks and Patriarchs. Behold, my friends such as thou seest are holy men from Alexandria!"

Laughing bitterly, Mary entered the chamber.

The banquet-room was oblong in shape; the walls crudely painted with scenes from the Gospels. The Last Supper was

depicted, with John seated on the right hand of Christ, and Judas, with a satanically evil visage, scowling, on the left. The Christ, bad as the painting was, reminded Mary of the Greek Hermaphroditus. Everywhere she looked Mary saw the religious symbols of the Christian faith—designs of fish, crossed keys, crosses, the Lamb and bishop's crook. They were carved on the woodwork, embroidered on the tablecloth, beaten into the copper plates, and painted on the clay wine-cups.

On the table, in the centre of the room, were rows of candelabra. The candles glittered brilliantly, lighting the chamber. Servants brought basins of perfumed water and washed the feet of the monks as they reclined on couches.

Performers ranged themselves along the wall. Flute-players began a Syrian melody; this was reinforced at proper intervals by harps and horns. A dancing-girl who had come from Joppa unrolled a rug upon the floor.

Food was brought in great copper platters. The servants stood behind the monks, serving them. Amphoræ of wine, sweetened with honey and spiced with calamus and cinnamon, were poured into craters on the table.

The monks glutted themselves with food, they spilled wine over their garments. As they drank their spirits rose.

"We were all fools in our folly," shouted Sylvanus. "But now let there be song! Let there be dancing!" As the wine mounted to their heads the monks beat time with their fists on the table; their bodies moved in rhythm to the music. They shouted. Alypius sang.

Archippus, with suddenly exaggerated solemnity, intoned as though he were reciting the Psalms:

"As spake the excellent author of Ecclesiastes: '*I commend mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink and be merry.*' As the wise man said, '*To-day we live, to-morrow we die. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart!*'"

Epaphras, smacking his jowls over the fat tail of a Syrian sheep, retorted in a loud voice:

"*A living dog is better than a dead lion—a monk in his cups hath more joy than one who hath his bones enshrined on an altar!*"

Attracted by the revel, beggars swarmed on the terrace without. Pilgrims, among whom the appalling rumor had spread that the revellers were recalcitrant monks who had brought a woman with them on a galley from Alexandria, gathered in the courtyard, watching from the distance.

The monks began making plans. They discussed their life in the desert, they ridiculed themselves and their pieties. Against Niobides, whose rule had been severe, many were resentfully bitter.

"He believed himself already a saint! He urged us to fastings and mortifications that he might be glorified throughout Egypt. Pilgrims prayed to him as they pray to saints!"

"Where think ye he hath gone?" asked Allamides.

"He hath hanged himself," said Archippus, with a grim click of his jaws.

"Yea," bawled Epaphras, "may his assumption be glorious!"

They began to argue concerning religion. Had Christ died for men? Had He ever lived? Philoramus declared He was a myth. Onesiphorus avowed that He had lived and was divine. Sylvanus averred that He did not partake of the divine nature at conception, but assumed it at birth. All agreed that He had nothing to do with founding orders of priests, monks, or cenobites. They derided St. Anthony. For a while they argued regarding the nature of the Trinity—was the Son consubstantial with the Father? The old Sabellian arguments regarding a merely nominal Trinity were revived. Some of the monks quarrelled, soon to forget their arguments in wine.

"Egypt has given all the religions to the world," said Maro. The Virgin Mary was none other than Isis, and Jesus her child Horus. Were not the seated images of the Virgin and child copied from the immemorial figures of Isis?

"Men create their gods in their own image," said Archippus sapiently. "I heard a philosopher say that once in Carthage."

"The priests frighten us with scarecrows!"

"There are no gods!" hiccupped another. "The Jews frighten themselves with a scolding graybeard, the Greeks with a manufacturer of thunderbolts. We trembled before

abbots, whose mortifications and ulcers terrorized us, and cringed before a Patriarch."

"Who hath lice in his beard—ehen!"

"Who is yon woman these sots have brought with them?" asked one of the women who had joined the monks, with envious eyes. "She seemeth to have carried away the jewel mines of Djebel Zabur and Badakshan!"

"Methinks 'tis the Queen of Sheba!" another sneered.

"She neither eats nor drinks!" a third commented. "She hath the amiability of a Gorgon!"

At the head of the table Mary sat, silent, unresponsive to the merriment about her, her body benumbed with weariness, her brain reeling with a nauseous disgust. A horror of the ribald drinking crew filled her. It seemed that all her life she had passed from banquet table to banquet table, from orgy to orgy, only to witness the bestiality of men besotted with drink. As dancer, singer, pantomimist, and courtesan she had always been the creature of men's caprice and pleasure, of their jibes and contempt. And to what end? What had she gained? Love?—such love as she desired, she had never found. Pleasure?—fitfully, but only to find that pleasure palled. Friendship?—that men had never given. She had known no affectionate companionship, no understanding sympathy, no response of heart and soul from either men or women. And now, after all, what remained? Her life was as a season drawing to a close, without harvest, without fruit, and before her—a winter of famine, darkness, a dread of life, an even greater dread of death. Defrauded and cheated of all she sought, she had drunk of the "golden cup" to its last dregs of wormwood and gall. Revenge itself had proved to be only fruit of the Dead Sea that turns to salt and ashes on the lips. . . . Was there no end to woman's humiliations? Was there no goal to her long road of sorrow? Within her own experience Mary had but compassed the wider tragedy of her race—the tragedy of woman's debased exploitation and degradation, of her eternal yearning and despair. Was she to be condemned and stoned eternally? Was there no deeper love to answer the need of woman's heart? Was there no nobler destiny for women than to pander to lust or be a legalized breeding chattel?

. . . Were there no men who were pure of heart, loving for love's sake alone, comprehending of weakness and of woman's deeper nature? Were there none to companion her with love, to heal the immemorial ache of her bruised and wounded heart? . . . A strange awe came upon Mary—yea, by the lips of a child that night she had been told there had been One. . . . Well, she did not know.

The hours waxed late. The stench of food, sour wine, vomit, and incense smoke filled the room. Mary's head ached insupportably; she felt giddy; a sick faintness now and then overcame her, and momentarily the surroundings vanished. . . . The hubbub of voices now and then was drowned by the drums in her brain. . . . She shuddered as though chilled; her feet and hands were cold as ice. The scene about her did not seem to partake of the world of reality—she seemed living in a delirious somnambulism. . . . Now and then the import of what was taking place flashed upon her. . . .

Some of the monks, with coarse laughter, were making ribald jest of the happenings on the galley. . . . Archippus, insensibly drunk, making mockery of his stig-mata, displayed his hands, and with loud guffaws declared he had not only perpetrated a joke on his brethren but a prank on the Deity! Had he stayed in the desert he would have become a great abbot, ruled ten thousand, been visited by pious patriarchs, and had his bones when he died enclosed in glass and venerated in the Cæsareum. They would have worked miracles. . . . His laughter was terrible. . . . The clamor of music and upraised voices mounted higher and higher—there were incessant shrillings from the syrx, the tempestuous clashing of cymbals, the melancholy noise of the sambuca, the blare of horns, spasmodic quiver of harp strings—fragments of obscene songs, oaths, laughter, wild yelpings. They drank themselves into a delirium, utterly lost their reason. They debauched like demoniacs.

Suddenly Mary cringed back in her chair, her palms outstretched in defence. Shouting and singing, a reeling band surrounded her. Mary saw madness in their eyes. A low moan of fear escaped her lips.

“Salome danced before Herod and won the head of John

the Baptist! Thou art fairer than the daughter of Herodias! Dance for us! Whatever thou mayest ask shall be given!"

"*There is a time to weep and a time to laugh and a time—a time to dance!*" chanted Epaphras hiccoughing.

"Dance!" cried Archippus reeling. "*Dance and we shall dance with thee rejoicing! Did not David dance before the Lord with all his might?*"

The chorus yelled, "With all his might!"

Mary remembered the hideous nights on the galley; her pitiful revenge; and the self-humiliation and shame that made her spirit writhe with sickness within her. . . .

She looked desperately about. Roughly they dragged her to her feet. Reeling about, they tore at her garments, wrenched her hands, buffeting her hither and thither in their midst. Archippus tried to drag her to the middle of the floor. His breath was rancid on her face.

Suddenly the congested throng reeled apart as though riven by a knife. Staggering away as though struck, the amazed monks glared at Mary with gaping mouths, wide-staring, terrified eyes. In a moment she seemed to have dilated in stature and, with an access of terrific vigor, had swept apart her arms hurling her tormentors from her.

Her eyes blazed with white-hot anger. A spasmodic recoil suddenly freed her from her benumbed inertia. Galvanized with revulsion, a fury of indignation, a flux of vitalizing strength surcharged her. Goaded to the extremes of endurance, something seemed to have burst its leash within her; it was as though, outraged, plundered, and debased for years, her woman-nature—in its deeper integrity, its intrinsic nobility—at last rose in an indomitable insurgence of revolt and protest, transfiguring her with an inspired splendor of rage. Her cheeks burned; her bosom heaved.

Stamping her feet, she shook her fists at the cowering monks, trembling in excess of wrath.

"Swine! Swine! Away, away from me!" Her voice was vibrant with menace. "Touch me not! Oh, that I ever went among you! Fool accursed by the gods that I am! Fool! Fool!" She smote her breasts in her rising passion. "Away



from me! I am done with you—I am done with all men! Oh, swine, swine that ye are . . . insufferable swine!”

Fiercely she tore the irid-winged dragon-flies from the lobes of her ears and the myriad-colored scorpion from her breast and, hurling them to the floor, savagely crunched them under the mother-of-pearl heels of her sandals. Her face contorted with frenzy, her teeth gritted in the ferocity of her wrath. From her arms and wrists she dragged the circlets and bracelets of ebony, silver, and gold, and from her fingers plucked the rings, and threw them recklessly right and left. With impatient fury, almost strangling herself, she ripped from her throat Poppæa's collar of pale pearls and, dashing it to the floor, ruthlessly ground it with her heels. Wrenching with both hands at the ropes of diamonds, emeralds, and rubies about her neck, she rent apart the silver threads on which the gems were strung, and with spasmodic flings of her arms angrily shook them from her. They rattled on the floor like falling hail.

“She hath gone mad,” whispered one of the prostitutes. There was a vicious scramble on the floor among the beggars, dancers, and musicians for the jewels.

Crunched under her feet, the priceless jewels of courtesans and queens sounded like glass crushed to powder. Turning abruptly, Mary swept through the stricken throng like a wind.

At the doorway she came to a stop. The passion and strength of her paroxysm suddenly snapping, she weakly collapsed against the side of the doorway, utterly unnerved, unstrung. She reached out her arms, laughing hysterically, tears rolling down her cheeks.

“I am going to the tomb of Christ——” her voice quavered. “Will ye not come with me?” Her outstretched arms shook as with palsy. “Will—ye—not—come—with—me?”

The monks glared at one another in utter consternation. The women, scurrying after the jewels, laughed and jeered.

“I am going——” Mary's voice, her mad hysteric laughter, broke in an uncontrollable outburst of choking sobs. Sobbing despairingly, heart-brokenly, she turned and, gathering her mantle about her, fled wildly across the terrace from the courtyard of the inn.

## XIX

THE Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre loomed sombrely in the night, its gilded cross-surmounted dome rising and swelling like a great golden bubble of foam in the faint unearthly luminance of the moon as it seeped through rifts in the thick murk of clouds gathering across the sky. The atmosphere was humid, oppressive. The world was ominously still.

The massive bronze-grilled gate, leading to the vast court of the shrine, had been left ajar so that any pilgrims who had come for the festival might, if they desired, spend the night in prayer before the burial place of Christ.

Outside, alone, gazing within the darkling space of the court, in the distance of which lights burned and twinkled like red-fiery eyes, paused Mary the courtesan, a nervous, awed trepidation, an uncomprehended fear, an expectation verging on terror holding her back.

What instinct had prompted her with a desire to go to the shrine—as if it promised refuge to her tormented, tired soul—she did not know. Moved by one of those impulses that sometimes involuntarily take hold of and guide us, without our volition, an inspiration, as it were, of a deeper nature within, Mary had followed one of the bands of pilgrims who, with prayers and the singing of Psalms, were visiting the scenes of Christ's ministry and the stations of the passion. These pilgrim parties were accompanied invariably by readers from the Judean churches who acted as guides and, at the various shrines, recited the accounts of Christ's doings and words as given in the Gospels.

Whilst she followed the pilgrims, listening to the gray-haired guide, Mary wondered why it was that she had never been acquainted with these things as a child among the Christians known by her father. Why had they never told about the pardon of the Magdalene? Impelled by an eager, thirsting desire to learn more of Christ thus, from the story of the Gospels, Mary, weak as she was, and ill, rallied her forces and managed to keep pace with the pilgrims in their journey, and was now left, alone, without Christendom's supreme shrine.

Mary hesitated long after the pilgrims had departed. It was far past midnight. Mary seemed alone in a dead world.

Crushed with a shuddering realization of the futility of her life, the goading humiliation and shame of her woman-nature contaminated, prostituted, and defiled, filled with a bitter self-loathing and a vast horror of men and their sensualities, she wanted desperately to be away from all men, from the world, to hide herself, to be engulfed in oblivion. As never before, a horrifying comprehension of all that might have been dawned, but without hope, upon her. Had she learned to love rather than hate, to forgive rather than seek revenge, had she devoted herself to a service of love to all humanity rather than a career of splendid ignominy, of ignoble glory—ah, how full and sweet and rich might not her life have been! But now it was over; hers was verily the bitter and empty cup of the woman robed in scarlet and decked with gold and precious stones. . . . Heart-sick, heart-broken, overwhelmed by the ghastly loneliness of her spirit, despairing and utterly undone, she desired now only to die. . . . Withal, before the temple Mary curiously felt the premonitory thrill, the fearful prescience of being on the brink of some supreme adventure, as though, beyond the threshold, there awaited some unknown, longed-for experience, as though something—she knew not what, perchance the promise of this strange, sweet Christ's words—awaited its fulfilment in the mystery of the darkness. . . .

Resisting her impulse to flee, she recalled the words she had heard that night—

“Come, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” She desired rest—ah, how her tortured, exhausted spirit desired rest—rest without thought, rest without dreams! . . .

With both hands—hesitantly, timidly—Mary pushed back the ponderous bronze gates and entered. Crossing the vestibule, before her extended the spacious courtyard, paved with finely-polished stone, open, as it had been designed by Constantine, to the pure air of heaven, and enclosed on three sides by porticos of great length, their marble columns dimly visible in the penumbra of the night. Darkly in the back-

ground loomed the mighty rotunda of the church. In the foreground before her, in the centre of the court, surrounded by pillars of rare marble, rose the huge rock of the Sepulchre. In this rock had been quarried—according to the legend—by Joseph of Arimathea, two chambers, in the outer of which nine men could stand, and from the farther wall of which opened the second and smaller recess wherein had reposed the body of the Lord. Over the tall pillars surrounding the rocks stretched a canopy of royal magnificence glinting with jewels and gold. Before the shrine, like crimson eyes, burned seven Byzantine lamps, the radiance shimmering scintillantly on the ornate tapestries, the begemmed, crowned, sumptuously-robed statues, the gold-encased eikons, and the massy gold and silver candelabra and censers surrounding the tomb.

Fearfully, hesitantly, Mary groped her way across the court toward the redly-glittering rock of the Sepulchre. Soft rugs yielded beneath her feet. The subtle aroma of frankincense lingered in the sultry air. The mysterious sepulchral gloom and stillness of the court oppressed Mary. Utterly overcome by fatigue and exhaustion she sank to the pavement, crouching on her knees.

She was alone—alone at last—nigh to the tomb of Christ. . . .

Already she questioned her reason for coming. What was there to find? . . . A deathly silence—a drearily dismal loneliness. . . . The vacancy of the tomb—the vacuum of death . . . Yet the thought of going back into the city among men made the trembling woman recoil. She wanted to die . . . O God, if God there be, she wanted to be engulfed, dispersed, annihilated in the blackness. . . . The brief exaltation inspired by the words of Christ had passed. Those words were beautiful. . . . Perhaps there was hope for others . . . in future lives . . . and a redeeming expiation. . . . But for her . . . it was too late. Even were she able to re-live her life again, she was too weary, too undone, for effort. She desired only oblivion—a dreamless death. . . . The very thought of life everlasting filled her with dread. Stealing upon her unawares, as she crouched there in melancholy meditation, she became

aware of—or imagined she heard—the sound of voices. . . . Her heart pounded with apprehension. Did her ears deceive her? She bent her head, straining her senses. . . . Now she heard nothing. The place was tautly silent, dead. . . . The tapers in the lamps flickered . . . and yet presently . . . unmistakably . . . afar off . . . so faint it was hardly audible, yet softly swelling . . . there came the soft surge of dolorous music and the sound of dimly murmurous voices chanting. . . . Were pilgrims coming at that hour? The sound did not come from without the court; nor was it within the church. Rather did it seem to creep up through the earth at her feet and to filter through the very stones. . . . Nor was this the chanting of human voices. . . .

Mary's flesh grew cold. She would have fled, but she was afraid to move. She heard as one hears in a dream, volitionless, dumb. Now, when she strained her hearing, she could hear nothing . . . all was still. . . . Again, creeping out of the very silence, with an immeasurable rhythmic swelling, ebbing and flowing like an antiphonally sougning wind, came a ghostly dirge as of phantom armies invisibly moving . . . a funereal *miséréré*, sombrely, sweetly, sadly pulsing from some other-dimensional world. . . . It seemed as though thousands of the dead were breathing some abysmal lament from the under-world of the graves; as though, in that strange, almost soundless threnody, now sibilantly wailing as the whisper of wind among mountain cedars, now resurgently rising with desperate implorings and clamant appeals like to the booming of far, far-distant tides, these voices mingled expressed the desires and despairs of all the perished races of the earth. Unable to move, appalled by the dolorous gloom of that mystic lamentation, Mary hearkened, straining her senses. She seemed to detect afar the moaning of creatures in immitigable distress, and it seemed that, as a strange undertone, insistent, appealingly sweet, there pulsed through that direful litany a note of hope, almost imperceptible, yet surely a note of that sustaining hope of the immortal soul which, in its uttermost misery, can never, never utterly die. . . . Was there then no death? . . . Did

the shades of men wander in the under-world of the shadows, tormented by the unrealized or unconquered desires of their lives, the anguish of unatoned sins? . . . Did they burn in the fires of unassuaged passions, of love or hatred? . . . Were they devoured by the worms of remorse? . . . And yet, in a misery she felt was vastly greater than her own, did they not cease to hope? . . . To whom, then, in their desolation did they appeal? To whom did they raise their voices in prayer? From whom was there hope of succor in that world of the dead? . . . Mary felt the suction upon her spirit of the straining magnetic impetus of surrounding spirit tides. . . . She was conscious of the closing-in of invisible hosts, of the light passing of invisible feet. . . . The air seemed to stir with the tremor of wings. Her flesh crept. Upon her face she felt the brush of moving and palpable wraiths—a sensation as soft, yet distinct, as that of moist mists bathing one's face as they are driven from the sea. And all about, teeming, Mary became aware of mighty presences, of the all-seeing gaze of unseen eyes. . . . With a sobbing cry of affright she leaped to her feet to flee. But at that moment, ere she could turn, she was transfixed in her movements, suddenly stunned as by a blow, and for a moment was smitten blind.

It was as though a thousand lightning bolts had struck the rock of the Sepulchre. There was no sound—only an intolerably blinding flash. In a moment, a breath, the darkness of the night was consumed in light; the entire court-yard, in an instantaneous outburst, engulfed in a blazing brilliance of such unbearable cold-white intensity that Mary, awestruck, dumfounded, thought her eyes would shrivel to ashes in their sockets. And yet at the very instant, through the momentary blackness of her stunned senses, came the Vision.

With a low cry of wonder, Mary beheld the incarnation of her heart's desire, that for which she had sought all the days of her life. Athwart the shrine palpitated a heavenly nimbus in which seemed woven all the fiery systems of the constellations of suns and stars. With the flash of comets and bursting meteors, the marvellous nimbus dilated and widened in eddying circles and streaming rivers of fire that wavered like molten

quicksilver and quivered with the tremor of lightnings. In the devouring blaze the sanctuary lights paled and utterly vanished. Time and space were abolished. As Semele in beholding God, Mary felt herself consumed in burning glory.

Staggering forward, her arms outstretched in beseeching appeal, with mingled terror and ecstasy, she breathed:

“Who—art—Thou? . . . Tell me who Thou art?”

Gazing upon her from the flaming vortex of the splendor, Mary beheld a Face of such transcendent beauty and all-comprehending tenderness as she had never seen in the world of men . . . a Face concentrating within itself all the archetypal dreams of loveliness desired and unbeheld upon the earth, and burning with the vital radiance of the world's essential youth. . . . Gathering substance, as it were, from sublimated tissues of fire, Mary beheld the Countenance assume the distinctness of human features glorified and transfigured—saw the Divine take upon itself the semblance of the human. The brow was whiter than the driven snows of mountains, the cheeks lustrously gleamed with the soft pink-pearl blush of dawn upon the sea, the lips were softly, strangely human, the unfathomable eyes shone like prodigious suns, and fierily concentrated the crystallizing morning blueness of the rivers of the sea. Upon the golden head, enmeshing the light of stars, trembled a luminous emerald-green coronal—the semblance of a plaited crown of thorns, ruby-tipped with drops of bleeding flame. Looming aloft in mighty majesty, the Figure was swathed in a vestiture of the purple-blue fabric of the skies, flecked with quivering lightning fires, chasing comets, and irid stars. The burning feet but touched the earth, and the arms, outstretched, seemed to reach, with an infinite, immortal, all-hungering love, as if to enfold the world in some thrilling divine embrace. . . . Upon the extended palms, like the dripping glow of blood-red meteors, Mary saw the markings of crimson wounds, and, gazing, she beheld crimson wounds upon the feet. . . . The starry-purple vestiture of the Vision shimmered, . . . the crown of thorns shot forth beaded tongues of flame, . . . and in the dilating nimbus seemed to burn the quintessential fires that vitalize and impregnate the universe. . . .

Irresistibly drawn by the infinite pitying tenderness and all-consuming love of those blue-burning eyes Mary—bereft of awe, bereft of fear—moved slowly forward, step by step, until, with arms outstretched, she sank upon her knees at the very entrance of the tomb. An enraptured transport filled her. Without consciousness of space or time, she seemed to feel her spirit drawn forth and absorbed by the burning glory of the Vision—felt her essence abolished and drowned in an inundating flood of living, tingling love . . . a love more permeating, more vital than the air she breathed, more integral, more essential to life than the blood of her heart. . . . Suffused with a permeating sweetness, a glowing warmth, Mary tried to grasp vaguely, with an enraptured bewilderment, an entranced wonderment, but without knowledge, without comprehension, as to Who gazed upon her from that vortex of flame, as to Who smiled with a divine pitying and illimitable compassion, as to Who reached out His arms in a love vast as the universe, as vital as the God-breath that sweeps suns in their orbits and animates the stars. Mary had worshipped many gods, and sought love in vain among many men . . . and now, unto the Vision Beautiful, unto the All-Desired, she reached out wildly yearning and imploring arms.

"Tell me . . ." she breathed, scarce able to speak in the swooning excess of intoxicating and marvelling delight, "*Tell me . . . tell me . . . who Thou art. . . .*"

Even as she asked Mary beheld—through the burning films of the nimbus, and cast far behind the austere Figure athwart the firmament—the darksome shadow of a vast cross.

"Thou art . . . Thou art——"

In a flash her own identity, with its horrors, returned. Blasted with a withering shame, an annihilating, swift-smiting sense of the vileness of her life, agonized with a hopeless remorse, a dreadful fear, Mary tremblingly quailed away. . . . Had the love she sought amid the ways of the world in vain come to her only as a tormenting mockery? Was the Unknown All-Desired of her soul Him whom she had hated and despised? Had God Himself come unto man as this lowly Nazarene who had been crucified? And now had He come to her only to flay her with the lightnings of His wrath? . . .



Softly, sweetly, strange music pulsed through the air—music such as was never heard on land or sea, and softer than soft summer winds sweet with the wafted odors of enchanted gardens.

*"I am the Way, the Light and the Truth! No man cometh unto the Father but by Me!"*

The burning carnelian lips of the Vision smiled a promise more radiant than any dawn. The eyes, more fierily blue than the sapphire gulf-streams of the sea, devoured Mary in an all-knowing, all-forgiving, tender compassion.

"I am lost, O thou Lord, I am lost!" the woman moaned. "Thou hast come unto me too late! Thou hast come unto me to smite me! My life is spent, and now is my desolation come. My shame encompasseth me as night."

Mary cast herself abjectly, face forward, upon the stones.

With the gentleness of some lingering caress—gentler, tenderer than a mother's lips upon her babe at birth—the Voice spake again:

*"I am the Light of the World. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life."*

Mary beat the stone with her clenched fists, sobbing.

"O Lord Jesus, Thou Son of God, now I know Thee! Thou art He whom my soul sought in her misery and shamefulness! Thou art He whom my heart desired amid the abominations of the days of my glory! But then I knew Thee not. For I blinded mine eyes, and now Thou art come too late! Yea, Thou art come as One treading the wine-press of wrath! Thou art come to mock me in my despair and to mete unto me as I deserve to the uttermost. Nevertheless, Lord Christ, Thy will be done unto me! Lord! I am as one dead in my sins! Judge me and destroy me as Thou wilt! Lord, let me be no more at all!"

As thunders bursting from the skies, with the triumphance of harpers harping upon harps, the message came:

*"I am the Resurrection and the Life! He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, shall live."*

Lifting herself fearfully with imploring gaze, Mary beheld the vast extended arms, swathed in a vestiture of clouds and star-fire, tremble as pinions of flame, and from the crown of

thorns lambent tongues ascending like red fountain-fires leaping unto the very zenith of heaven.

Smiting her bosom, in a dull despair, in infinite contrition, Mary murmured:

"Behold me, O Lord. I was a woman in the city and a great sinner. All the days of my life have I squandered! Yea, now Thou comest unto me, the Bridegroom of my spirit, and I am barren and despoiled and without hope! Thy wrath is as the lightning! Let Thy fury rest upon me, O Lord. Destroy me and let me die!"

As a wind wafting sweet odors from the spirit-gardens of unborn springs, the Voice came again:

*"Whosoever believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?"*

Intoxicated, almost fainting, Mary sighed:

"Yea, O Lord!"

*"Therefore, thy sins are forgiven."*

"Lord, Lord!" she called. *"Is not God angry with the wicked every day? Doth He not prepare the instruments of death and ordain His arrows against His persecutors? Lord, my sins are as the waves of the sea and the sands of the shores!"*

*"To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. Verily I say unto thee there is more joy in heaven over one who repenteth than over ninety and nine just which need no repentance. I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels."*

"Lord, all men have judged me; by all am I condemned."

*"Men judge after the flesh. I judge no man. I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."*

Mary's eyes gleamed through her tears.

"Lord, Lord, I believe in thee! Lord, I love thee. Yet I deserve no mercy—Lord, what repentance can I make? What gifts offer unto Thee? How can I be saved? Lord, I am as empty as wells dry of water, and my soul is barren as grass burned by fire. What atonement is there for such as I?"

With a sounding resonance that shook the earth to its foundations and galvanized Mary to her feet the Voice thundered:

*"Woman, arise! Behold though thou wert a woman in the city and a great sinner, men made thee thus. Wherefore I say unto thee, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace!*

*"Go unto thy brethren, and My brethren, and say unto them I am risen to My Father and their Father, My God and their God! And say I pray that they may be one as the Father and I are one, and that you may be one in Us.*

*"A new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another as the Father loveth Me, and as I love you."*

The voice died away as winds sough into the silence, as twilight merges into night. The divine face radiantly gleamed with an infinite tenderness beyond all mortal compassion, the ineffable lips parted, the burning blue wells of fire that were the eyes dilated with a devouring passion of eagerly-desiring, all-comprehending love. . . . And then, in a moment, as though a thousand lightning bolts had struck the rock of the Sepulchre, torrentially engulfing world and sky, in an instant—a breath—the Divine Countenance dissolved in a cataclysm of blazing lightnings—the Vision vanished . . . and the thick, immitigable inky blackness that follows lightning-flares blotted the court of the Holy Sepulchre. Mary uttered a low cry, and, as one startled suddenly from a dream, groped about in the total dark in dazed bewilderment, for a moment at a loss for her own identity, unaware as to where she was.

In the darkness, slowly and by degrees, she became aware of the seven sanctuary lamps burning like ruby eyes. Then she saw the gemmed crowns of statues and gold eikons reflecting gleams of light. . . . She was kneeling in the court of the Holy Sepulchre—before the rock-hewn grave of the dead Christ. . . . Dead—was He dead? With a sick, awful horror, her own personality swept upon her. . . . Wildly, incredulously, she glared about, seeking—then, frenzied with despair, she madly flung herself before the shrine, crying aloud:

*"Thou goest! Lord, Lord, leave me not! Lord, whither dost Thou go?"*

For a moment the silence was taut—terrible. . . . Then, as a memoried and loved voice recalled, with a keen, soft-singing sweetness, the answer breathed up into Mary's soul:

*"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Verily, verily, I say unto you, in My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you and all who love and seek Me for ever and ever."*

Had a voice spoken? She gazed about with a distraught, imploring questioning. . . . Yes, before her burned the seven crimson lamps. The gemmed crowns of the statues, the gold eikons and candelabra reflected gleams of light. She was not dreaming, she was awake. . . . Awake. . . . The palpable stillness, the stifling darkness of the surrounding porticos, the black, menacing bulk of the towering Basilica, the night—black and devoid of life—filled her with an immeasurable desolation. Crouching to the pavement, she wrung her hands.

"Lord, Lord! Turn Thy face not away from me! Give me not unto despair! O Lord, I believe in Thee and love Thee! Without Thee there is no life. Leave me not! Without Thee, whither shall I go? O Lord, Thou art the Light of the World, and Thee only I desire!"

Seeping through a rift in the heavily-moving clouds the waning moon appeared, attenuated, pale, silvery, fleeing, dimly shedding an eerie light upon the world. As a wafted wind breathing through the silence, as deliciously sweet music melting from afar, Mary heard the promise:

*"I will not leave you comfortless. I will come again unto you. Ask and it shall be given. Seek, and ye shall find Me."*

The court was still, chill, oppressive with death—a pompous tomb. The red lights danced over the gorgeous images and tapestries. The desperate woman, wringing her hands and rocking her body to and fro, wailed:

"Where, O Lord, where shall I find Thee?"

She fell upon her face, before the bedizened rock, prostrate.

Thereupon, as though it trailed . . . tremulously . . . downward . . . from the farthest stars . . . in pulsing waves . . . the answer came:

*"Within . . . thy . . . heart."*

## XX

IN one of the rambling narrow streets Mary, wandering enrap, encountered the monks.

An incarnadine blush suffused the opaque east; in the distance cocks crowed. Birds had begun chirruping in the gardens.

Preceded by torch-bearers, the party advanced, with musicians making discord. Some of the monks were borne in litters. Others staggered and reeled as they walked afoot. They were accompanied by beggars, the riffraff of taverns and other vicious parasites of the city's night life. With a great shout, espying her, they bore down upon Mary.

"Come with us! We are going to pay our respects to his holiness, the Patriarch!"

They surrounded Mary, swaying unsteadily, laughing, shouting, raving in an inebriate dementia. Epaphras rolled from a litter.

Alypius chanted, his voice intermittently drowned in the hubbub:

"Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by:

"Let none of us go without his share in our proud revelry: everywhere let us leave tokens of our mirth." \*

Mary's eyes glowed with a mystical exaltation. She lifted her hand, commanding silence, and, as if awed, the clamor subsided.

"Men of Nitria, come with me!" she pleaded. "As I led you into the way of sin and death, let me lead you unto the Resurrection and the Life! As I led you into darkness, let me lead you unto the Light! For lo! the Lord Christ liveth! He is not dead! He hath risen to the Father, that ye may also become one with Him in the Father! Will ye not come with me?"

"Whither shall we go with thee?"

Mary pointed to the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre—a mountainous bulk of masonry, with its gilded dome looming in the distance against the ruddy dawn.

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\* Wisdom of Solomon, xi.

"She is mad," jeered Nebridius.

"Nay, brother," replied Mary, "only now hath my reason returned to me. I was as one dead in my sins. Now I live. *Will ye not come with me?*"

"She mocketh us! She holdeth us to ridicule!"

One by one Mary pathetically, earnestly importuned. But they laughed in her face; they whispered obscene raileries in her ears. One and all rejected her. The flutists and harpists set up a discord. A drunken sailor who had accompanied the party, imbibing by the generosity of the monks as they stopped at the taverns, managed to shoulder his way through the crowd. He recognized Mary.

"Is this the wench ye brought with you, oh sheep-skins!" He burst uproariously into ribald laughter. "Oh, long-beards! Oh, dwellers of cisterns! Is this the rose of your desert? The fair Circe of your merry voyage? 'Tis a jest to make Medusa laugh! So, 'twas for her ye forsook the ash-heap and the bastinado! Ho-ho-ho!" He turned about, leering at the crowd, flourishing his arms. "Why, I know yon jade! She danced in the inn of Damis of Alexandria, who hath some taste, 'tis said, for the desecration of graves! Danced—yea, till she was driven thence! By the Gorgon's head, every one in the quarter knew her for what she was and shunned her! Those who went with her became afflicted with incurable maladies. Oh, ye hair-shirts! She is unclean! Unclean!"

The monks glared at him in open-mouthed consternation. Their voices stayed in their throats.

"What sayest thou?" gasped Onesiphorus.

"Kiss the adder! Embrace the asp! Such is the love of your fair paramour!"

Convulsed with horror, Sylvanus shrieked:

"I understand! My God! My God! Did we deny ourselves only to drink of the cup of plagues and poison! She hath come among us to destroy us! She hath brought upon us the diseases of Egypt, and they cleave unto us! We are undone!"

Through the wine-fogs of their brains the appalling import of the sailor's words filtered. Some sobered out of cold terror. A low moan went up from the beggars.

"Woe! Woe! Hers is the kiss of the leper!"

"She was driven from inn to inn," taunted the seaman.

"She was hated as the pest!"

Not comprehending what transpired, Epaphras reeled about singing:

"Thy arms are the gates of the garden of pleasure! Thy feet are as doves' wings! Thy mouth is a well of sweet water!"

Archippus fiercely struck him on the mouth and turned threateningly upon Mary.

"Thou strumpet! Is this true what is said of thee? Speak!"

Sinking upon her knees, Mary buried her face in her hands.

"My sins have been as the plagues of a city! My love hath been a mockery and a curse, as the sword and the famine and the pestilence! My heart was bitter with hatred. Forgive me that I went among you! I beseech you, come with me unto Him who forgiveth all iniquities, who healeth all diseases! Forgive me, as ye would all be forgiven. Yea, come with me. For He would have us love one another even as He loveth us."

Distraught, panic-stricken with a nameless apprehension and horror, some became maudlin, fell upon the ground, rent their garments, and cast dirt upon their heads. In utter confusion, a hysteria of unreasonable fright, they shrieked and cried aloud, their voices drowning Mary's words.

"Sorceress!"

"Jezebel!"

"Throw her down! Leave her bare! We are eaten with the acid of her transgressions!"

Archippus, wringing his hands, lamented in a fearsome voice: "The judgment of God hath come upon us! We drank of a harlot's cup and became drunken! *'Give me any plague but the plague of the heart, any wickedness but the wickedness of a woman!'* \* Woe, woe unto us!

"The blood of our veins turneth to vinegar and our bowels

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\* Ecclesiasticus, xxv, 13.

rot! *'All malice is but little to the malice of a woman! Let the portion of a sinner fall on her.'*" \*

Lifting her tear-dimmed eyes, Mary piteously reached out her arms. Before she could speak, Archippus furiously smote her on the mouth with his fist.

"Behold her! *'Let her be judged after the manner of an adulteress.'*" †

They fell upon her. Her garments they tore to shreds and ripped from her. They dug their nails viciously into her flesh. With a low, sobbing cry, Mary huddled among them, her arms extended in unresisting resignation. Bravely she closed her eyes. They yelped and howled and hissed and gnashed their teeth in maniac frenzy. They smote her face with their fists and spat upon her. Seizing her by the hair, they dragged her over the ground.

"The Lord hath smitten us with an incurable disease!" The voice of Archippus was raucous, awful. *'A woman was the beginning of sin, and because of her we all die!'*" ‡

Then they picked up heavy stones.

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\* Ecclesiasticus, xxv, 19.

† Ibid., xxiii, 45.

‡ Ibid., xxv, 24.



## XXI

### THE desert.

Over illimitable stretches of crusted sand the sullen, sultry dawn, with something ominous and almost sinister in its slinking approach, creepily stretched bleeding fingers. In a sky of burning chrysoprase glowed the last beacon of the night, a fierily white incandescent star. Dark against the opal-fired east, the only relief in that expanse of awful, dead, dull monotony, granite boulders and pillars of basalt erected themselves, black and bleak. Along the north, the south, the west, purple-black mists swathed the horizon. As the dawn increased and the sun rose, they wrapped themselves up and vanished as wraiths put to rout. Save for patches of blue spurge and meagre tufts of camels' grass, the vast plains were barren of vegetation. The sand for long sweeps was smooth as glass, of the color of reddish ashes, and reflected the dawn with a ghastly glare; again it broke into rolling ridges and wave-like swells—a vast petrified ocean. In the vast valleys between the long ridges of dunes and the yawning hollows within crescent-shaped sand-hills, shimmered a mistily amethystine phosphorescence. Swiftly, magically, the twilight of night dissolved; day broke in desolate, burning glory.

The silence of the desert was so intense that it became virtually audible. It beat upon the ear-drums and oppressed. It seemed that, any moment, the earth must burst, or the sky crack—as if the universe could not long endure the tense, taut, maddening strain of it. The desolation of the region was palpable—it seemed a thing of bulk, that weighed down insupportably from the brassy sky; it closed in from the horizon; it suffocated and crushed, torturing the pores, sapping the veins, taking away the breath. It was a living presence, a prescient terror, something invisible but conscious, hostile to man, baleful—a spirit-force, vague, disembodied and monstrous; a vampire with its torrid mouth sucking upon the very throat of the earth. It partook of the heat of the sun, the glare of the brassy sky, the taut, grim stillness; it brooded and hung there, unrelievable, unmovable, intangible, insatiate, malign, and eternal.

The dead air was nauseous with the odor of sulphur.

The red sun rose above the sky-line. The horizon, like a cyclopean furnace, seemed to pour forth molten slag; the sky fumed with exhalations, gaseous, verdigris-green. Against the inflamed dawn, dim and illusory in the swirling maze of steaming heat-waves, the date trees of an oasis lifted aloft their tufted palms. A vulture, ghoulish, grisly, glided in slowly-narrowing circles in the air.

It was customary in those days for the members of the cenobite communities along the river Jordan, on the first Sunday of Lent, to disperse singly through the desert toward Arabia and there remain in solitude and prayer until Palm Sunday, when, prepared by meditation and fasting, they would return to celebrate Easter together. During this penitential season they partook of no food save desert herbs. Wandering far apart into remote regions of the wilderness, they had no communication whatever with one another.

Thus it so happened that, after spending the night with his brethren in the singing of psalms and partaking of communion, Zozimus, a monk of the community of St. John the Baptist on the Jordan, fared forth one morning, leaving the river behind him. He travelled with his face to the east, chanting:

*"The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life: of whom then shall I be afraid?"*

Zozimus was an aged man, acquainted with the decrees and doctrines of the Church councils and wise in theological problems and speculations. He was gifted in letters and for fifty-three years had lived in the same hut, praising God and copying upon papyrus the epistles of St. Paul, his favorite apostle. For twenty days Zozimus travelled through the desert, partaking of no food save the meagre juice of acrid herbs, devoting his nights to prayer and to struggling with demons. On the morn of the twentieth day, weakened by privations and the sapping heat of the wilderness, Zozimus was prepared to retrace his steps homeward when he saw, in the distance, the trees of an oasis looming against the sky. Fearing lest weak-

ness overcome him before he should complete his return, Zozimus gratefully beheld the promise of wild dates and cool water, and, deeming it expedient to refresh himself, bent his steps thither.

The sand broke into feathery flakes beneath his feet. The sulphurous air parched his lungs and cracked the membranes of his throat. In the glare of the sun his eyes ached with the sting of needle-pricks. The silence drummed in his ears. He was terribly faint.

Zozimus knew that the evil ones often tormented the travelers of the desert with illusions of oases—date trees burdened with fruit, and distant springs surrounded by lush grasses. More than once his weary feet had sought the seductive shade of mirages. Prepared at any moment to see the date trees roll up and vanish, he experienced an enthusiastic delight when, as he approached, he saw concrete evidence of the actual existence of the refreshing garden spot in the presence of dragon flies, lilac- and opal-winged. Presently he heard the hum of wild bees, and locusts thrumming their love-lyres in the trees. Uttering a prayer of thanksgiving, he quickened his steps.

Terrified, Zozimus stopped short at the very verge of the oasis; for, kneeling on the grass in the shade of the palms, he beheld a woman. At first thought he believed her to be a demon. He had gone far beyond those regions of the desert where penitents sought seclusion; yet, as he gazed about, what he saw reassured him. The woman was emaciated to a shadow, her skin was white as snow. Her hands, clasped upon her bosom, were thin and wasted. Years before, her clothes must have fallen in decay from her, but her hair, falling nigh to her feet, clothed her in a shroud of wondrous gold. Her face was uplifted toward the dawn, her features glowed like alabaster lighted with flame. Her pale lips moved in prayer. Her eyes, wondrously wide open, gazed afar as one given even in waking to divine dreams. Built against a cave in a granite rock, Zozimus beheld a small hut constructed of reeds, palm leaves, and plastered with mud. Therein he saw a pallet of leaves, a water-jar, an earthen-ware bowl, and above the door, crudely made of dried branches, a cross.

Amazed yet gratified at finding a penitent in the remote depths of this burning desolation, Zozimus stepped forward and made the sign of the cross.

"Peace be unto thee," he said. "Glory to Christ!"

The woman rose slowly to her feet. For sheer excess of weakness her limbs trembled under her. Her body seemed virtually worn away to the soul; indeed, as a translucent veil it seemed imbued with the lustrous immaculate whiteness of a chastened spirit within. The woman moved forward, and smiled with a gentle sweetness.

"Welcome, brother. Peace be unto thee."

Lifting his hand, Zozimus pronounced the customary benediction.

"Thou hast wandered far, brother?" the woman asked.

"From the community of St. John the Baptist on the Jordan. Knowest thou the place?"

"Many years ago, when I came hither from Jerusalem, I passed thy hermitage, and one of thy brethren gave unto me three loaves of bread and a pitcher of water."

Zozimus, overcome, entreated the woman weakly—

"Sister, I am faint!"

From her hut the woman brought forth an earthen basin, which she filled at the spring. The monk drank thirstily. She brought forth also the honey of wild bees, dried locusts, and a bunch of wild dates. Zozimus ate sparingly.

"Hast thou been in the wilderness long, sister?"

"For many years, and from the time I came hither unto this day, I have not gazed upon the face of humankind."

"Verily, the ways of God are strange! And all the years thou hast given thyself unremittingly to penance, fasting, and atoning for thy sins?"

"Yea, brother. Night and day have I sought to purge myself of my old impurities, and have prayed for those who sinned by me."

"This is indeed commendable, and thou hast undoubtedly gained in grace and the favor of Heaven. Therefore thou bidest the time when the Heavenly Bridegroom will come unto thee?"

"Yea . . . when I shall be made one with all the world in His love and one with the Father."

The desert all around steamed like a cauldron of molten lead at white heat. Dragon-flies darted like flames in the air. The two—man and woman—were alone in a world of silence and fire.

"Thou hast gone singularly far from the habitations of men, sister." Zozimus concluded his repast. "'Tis in the silence we draw nigh to God."

"God is ever nigh to us if our hearts are open to receive Him. I came here after a sinful and troublous life in the world. God, in His mercy, forgave me my sins. Therefore did I seek to purge my nature of its lower cravings, and to learn the truth more clearly that I might be prepared to be born again upon the earth and to repair all the evil I had wrought."

The monk gazed at the woman with dubious questioning.

"Why sayest thou that thou wilt be born again upon the earth? Can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

"Thus have men asked before thee, brother. Plato, the philosopher, perceived that the progression of the soul is through lives upon the earth. Christ Jesus proclaimed this opportunity for expiation and redemption through His love. Know ye not that which is born of the flesh is flesh?—our body dieth and perisheth, but the soul liveth on. That which is born of the spirit is spirit. The flesh profiteth nothing, save it is the transient vehicle through which the eternal soul accomplishes its work in the world of men. Christ hath said, '*Unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit!*' Thus it is with the soul; we die that we may be born with increased life. Therefore, for the lives that are to come, do I prepare myself."

The monk's voice was harshly rebuking.

"Hast thou not repented? Thy words, woman, savor of the lying philosophies of the pagans, and Plato was an accursed heathen and idolater. Well do I know that many who profess Christ, even Origen, have fallen into the accursed belief of the reincarnation of souls—a false and pernicious doctrine. Why, foolish woman, shouldst thou desire to live a mortal life again? Art thou not desirous of eternal joy?"

The woman, of utter exhaustion, sank upon the grass. There was grave music in her voice as she answered:

"My brother, what is eternal joy? Is it to pass into a heaven of supine ease and wear a crown? To rest eternally? Nay, brother, rather shall our joy not be in an eternal labor of love? Shall we not seek to bring the lost—yea, even those in the uttermost hell—into the fold of God's love? Hath not Jesus enjoined to love others as He loveth us? Did He not descend Himself into the depth of hell to recall the fallen spirits there? Did He not pray before He died that all the world, all that lives—in this world and the world without—might become one with Him, in His fold, and thus one with the Father?"

Zozimus's brows knitted in a scowl.

"How canst thou effect the salvation of the lost in hell? If a man die in sin he is damned utterly. His punishment endureth forever."

The woman answered gently:

"Believest thou any soul is damned save by its own perverse will? Our spirits have travelled far through the eternities, brother; we have wandered over many wrong ways and through great darknesses. But One hath come who holdeth the Light and shows the Way! . . . Though a man be dead in his sins and hear His voice, yet he shall live!"

"If a man be baptized and enter the fold of the Church he shall be saved," muttered the monk. "Otherwise the wrath of God will rest upon him. For the wrath of God is eternal."

"Brother, the love of God lasteth forever and ever!" the woman's voice thrilled. "*God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"

Zozimus retorted fiercely:

"Those who die in sin forfeit the love of God and burn forever. There is no forgiveness after death."

The woman's eyes gleamed.

"Brother, shalt thou compass the love of God by the measure of time, of a day and a night? Shalt thou circumscribe His mercy to the brief space of a man's life? Did Jesus Himself not say: *'The hour is coming, and now is, when*

*the dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of man, and they that hear shall live'?"*

Zozimus rose with a stern air of sacrosanct authority.

"Thy words sound strange from a penitent, and savor of heresy. It hath been agreed by the fathers that the souls of those who died before Christ were not utterly condemned. Now that He hath come and entrusted His keys with the Holy Church, only those who are born by the waters of baptism into His militant kingdom, the Church, will be saved."

Gazing upward, sorrowfully, the woman asked:

"And limitest thou His kingdom to this world?"

Zozimus drew himself up austerely.

"Unto Peter He entrusted the power of loosing and binding. Unto him He gave the keys of His kingdom. Verily, His kingdom is that of the Holy Catholic Church, without which there is no salvation."

"Brother, how canst thou circumscribe the realm of Him who swingeth suns and stars in their majesty through the firmament to the dominion of men who in divers formulæ speak His Name? *'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, "Lo here!" nor "Lo there!" For behold the kingdom of God is within you!'*"

Her voice trailed into silence. Zozimus, confused and vexed, spoke harshly:

"Christ hath left His keys with the Holy Church. She alone can bind or loose, forgive or retain. Whoso is not of her fold is damned and there is no life in him!"

The woman responded:

"Christ said: *'If any man hear My words and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world!'* We are all children of God and brothers of the humankind. Why, therefore, should those of the Church hate the Arians and persecute unbelievers? Why should you deny salvation without the Church to any, living or dead? *'If a man say: I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar.'* Brother, in the supplication Christ uttered in the presence of His disciples before He went into Gethsemane the Lord Jesus prayed, *'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they may be one*

*as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee; that they may also be one in us.*' We are all partakers of one another's deeds and destinies, and we shall be saved and become one with God, only as we save others and the race of men becomes one with God. *'If a man live unto himself, prizing his own life, he shall lose it'*; he that loses his life for Christ's sake in obeying His word shall gain it. Why should we be concerned regarding the selfish salvation of our own soul, or seek perpetual rest? Would thy soul not weary in a heaven where there are no works of love to be done, no triumphs to be achieved? Brother, the labor of the soul is infinite. Verily, as the wind that cometh and goeth, and bloweth where it listeth, thus it is with the immortal spirit that cometh in and goeth out from the world of matter, through many mortal lives, ever doing God's will, ever developing, and finding pasture. Brother, \* *'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever . . . hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.'* Yea, brother, even to dying and taking up our lives again and yet again."

"Woman, how canst thou speak of saving others? For I say unto thee, the keys of salvation are entrusted to the Church and her priests. St. Paul hath commanded women to remain silent and be under obedience. How darest thou presume to speak concerning the purposes and nature of God?"

The woman answered gently:

"My brother, within my heart as in a mirror have been reflected the sins and sorrows of all womankind. I have lived, I have loved, I have suffered; I have sinned and been forgiven. I speak as one arisen from the dead, which is the death of sin. I have heard the truth."

Zozimus lifted his hand and with a gesture of crushing authority challengingly propounded to Mary a problem which at the time was one of the most seriously discussed and agitating sources of controversy and speculation among the Fathers:†

"Thou sayest, presumptuously, woman, that thou hast learned the truth. Tell me, what dost thou know concerning

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\* I John ii, 17; iii, 16.

† Fact.



the nature of God? Hath He such stature as a man, a body, and height and breadth? Doth He have hands and limbs, and canst thou measure them with the space of cubits? Doth He walk as mankind with legs? Doth He speak with a tongue? Is His voice heard? Doth He have a body, a beard, and hair and nails?"

Her eyes gleaming with an incomprehensible passion, a vast exaltation, the woman breathed the words caressively:

*"God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth!"*

"Methinks thou hast become somewhat vain-glorious, sister," said the monk. "A greater humility would more befit thee, and a silent conformance to the faith. Hast thou considered the position of woman in heaven? Or her relation to men in the kingdom? Knowest thou some of the fathers deny to woman a soul? \* Nevertheless, while the testimony of the holy apostles indicates that indubitably she hath a soul, it must be, as St. Paul inferred, inferior to men's. It was unto men that the Lord Jesus entrusted the keys of His Church. He gave His command unto Peter."

"Who denied Him thrice," the woman answered sadly.

"His apostles ate with Him at supper," sternly announced the monk. "Them He bade consecrate the Eucharist."

"Yet one betrayed Him to the priests, and of those who ate with Him, and whose feet He lovingly washed, none but one companioned Him to Calvary—a stranger carried His cross. Yea, and a woman wiped the perspiration from His brow. Women knelt at His feet when He died. Save John, Peter and the others gazed from afar."

"When He rose again," thundered Zozimus, "He appeared unto His apostles and *'opened their understanding to the Scriptures.'* Women were not intrusted with the spreading of the Gospel."

"Brother," said the woman tenderly, "*'He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with Him, as they*

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\* Also one of the amazing assertions of certain of the early fathers.

*mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that He was alive and had been seen of her, believed not!"\**

Zozimus's face angrily contorted.

"Woman brought the curse of original sin into the world," he fiercely declaimed. "She was beguiled by the snake and brought evil and wretchedness and damnation upon her seed. Forever and ever she is accursed! St. Paul hath said: '*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. . . . Suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*'"

Faint from long fasting, the woman closed her eyes.

"Thou speakest the words of Paul concerning women. I have heard the voice of One greater than Paul. Unto me and to all women, His voice speaks forever, '*Woman arise!*'"

Zozimus sternly rebuked her:

"Dost thou presume, miserable woman, to speak as it is forbidden—to usurp the authority of the successors of the apostles to whom the spreading of the Gospel was given?"

"When He had risen, Jesus chose a woman to bear the news of His resurrection unto men," the woman replied. "Unto her who had been reviled and condemned, the Magdalene, He appeared, saying: '*Go to My brethren and say unto them, "I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God!"*'†

"Perchance, brother, in time to come, when men are scattered and lost in the confusion of worldly pursuits and creeds and doctrines, in wickedness and greed, yea, when the world is torn by wars and the rumors of wars, women shall bear unto them the glad tidings that Truth and Mercy have risen from the dead, and proclaim, what men too oft forget, that *God is Love!*"

Only vaguely comprehending the woman's words, Zozimus sensed in them an unformulated rebuke and what seemed to him accursed heresy. Humble as she was and gentle, the monk regarded her with increasing disapproval and rising anger.

"Thou hast said thou wert a sinner."

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\* St. Mark xvi, 9, 10, and 11.

† St. John xx, 17.

"In the city of Alexandria I was of all sinners the most eminent in my false glory and shame. The world rang with the name of Mary the courtesan."

Thunderstruck, the monk reeled backwards, his eyes blazing with incredulous horror.

"They told me," said he, hoarsely, "that Mary of Alexandria, that woman of abominations, was dead."

Mary extended her arms heavenward, her face glowing.

"She that was dead in her sins is alive again! Mary of Alexandria liveth in the Lord!"

"Silence! Thy words reek of blasphemy!"

Zozimus drew his haircloth garment close about him as if he feared contamination from a leper. His form seemed to dilate terribly with wrath and condemnation. His voice swelled to a great roar:

"Thou art Mary of Alexandria! Most infamous of sinners, how darest thou presume upon the long-suffering mercy of the Lord! Woe to me, that I, a consecrated priest, should have listened unto thee! That I, a priest, should have bandied words with thee! Woe unto thee! Thou art then that woman of infamy more scarlet than the woman of Babylon! Thou art then that woman who didst corrupt men given to piety! Thou bride of the beast! Thou enemy of God and His Church, woe, I say, woe unto thee! Thou art as a city filled with plagues! Thy words are a pestilence!" He rent his robe. "Flee from the light of day! Cover thyself with sand! Hide thy face from the sun! Miserable fool, how darest thou presume thou art pardoned? Thy very penitence is a mockery and affront to God!"

His words choked in his throat, and he reeled away at what, for a moment, he saw. Her face buried in her palms, Mary, crushed by the priest's bitter words, crouched upon the ground. As Zozimus spoke, suddenly, wondrously, Mary's body seemed to dissolve to a filmed transparency and, as a prism of glass imprisoning a great light within, glowed with fire white as the snows of mountains. Affrighted, the monk clapped his palms over his eyes. When he looked again, the glory had departed. Swathed in her golden hair, Mary lay sobbing on the ground.

Smitten with a troubled misgiving, conscience-stricken, Zozimus fearfully moved toward Mary, his hand extended.

"Sister, perchance God hath heard thy prayers, and I have been hasty and harsh in judgment. Forgive me, for verily the ways of God are strange."

Mary lifted her face with gratitude and gladness.

"I was a great sinner and God forgave me. My sins were as a heavy darkness, but I beheld the Light of Life."

Awed by the meekness and patient sweetness of the woman, and the exaltation of love shining from her face, Zozimus made the sign of the cross in benediction.

"I go from thee. This hath been a strange experience. Verily thou wert a great sinner, and if I spoke hastily, 'twas but from horror of thy wrong-doings. Sister, I shall report unto my brethren that I have met thee, and tell the holy Patriarch of Jerusalem of thy penitence. The news of the favor thou hast found of God may prove salutary in bringing sinners to repent."

Rising, Mary feebly made her way into her hut, where she secured dates and honey; these she gave unto the monk.

"A year hence, if it be the will of the Lord, I shall return hither during the penitential season, and I will bring with me, that we may partake of it together, the eucharistic bread. Peace be with thee, sister."

"Brother, peace be unto thee."

Turning his face toward the Jordan, Zozimus, without looking back, passed onward into the desert, chanting:

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and inscrutable His ways!

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor?

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: To whom be glory forever!"

The sun reached the zenith. The desert blazed with a dry red heat. Zozimus, returning to tell the world of the conversion of Mary, was swallowed in the glaring distance. Waves of heat torridly rose like steam, the sand-hills seemed to heave

and undulate. Behind the burning clouds along the horizon the shadow-adumbrations of gigantic figures moved slowly, softly, with an appalling majesty.

"Lord," breathed Mary, a swooning faintness overcoming her. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. . . . I await Thy summons, oh my Lord. Tarry not too long! . . ."

Far, far away, with the sound of thunder, a voice seemed to call:

*"Women, arise!"*

Within a dazzling mirage of burning vapor Mary saw an angelic host with faces shining like suns. They rose with joyous triumphance toward heaven.

And the voice spake again:

"These are they who, bearing the burden of the races of the world, have overcome the world and the sins of their seed! These are they who, despised of men, have endured sorrow and drunk of the cup of tears, who were condemned of men and stoned, but are now exalted in the power and glory of Heaven. For behold, they have loved much. Their sins were as scarlet; they are become whiter than snow. Verily, there is joy in the presence of the angels! Brides of the heavenly kingdom! *Women, arise!"*

Summoning trumpet peals clarionly swelled through the burning skies.

Her face enrapt, illumined, Mary passed into the coma of exhaustion.

## XXII

WITHOUT her hut in the shade of the palms, Mary lay upon a pallet of dried grass and leaves. Over her frail body her long, golden hair swathed her like a luminous shroud. Her hands, like withered lilies, were crossed upon her breast. Her bosom scarcely stirred with respiration. Her lips moved in prayer. Her eyes, feverish and distended, gazed afar over the desert toward where a serried line of black spots drifting along the horizon marked a caravan bound from one outpost of civilization to another.

The sky burned like molten blue-green brass. The atmosphere fumed with heat-waves and the odor of sulphur. Breaking the torrid stillness, far, far away sounded the pleasantly sweet tinkle of silver camel bells.

The swollen sun rolled sluggishly down the sky. The date trees, smitten with heat, drooped their glistening palms. The tinkle of bells faded. The black specks vanished. Mary gazed after the disappearing procession with a welling tenderness, a yearning melancholy in her heart. The first evidence of human life since the visit of the monk Zozimus nearly a year before, the distant vision afforded Mary's thoughts a link to the human world far beyond, and to her life of the past. Utterly exhausted, her vitality ebbing, Mary was about to venture forth on that strangest of all human journeys: her sins, her temptations, her penitence and purgings over, she was about to embark for those mysterious goals beyond the uncharted deserts of the infinite. Hers was the waiting caravan of death.

Between periods of swooning torpor and delirium, Mary's mind cleared for intervals with that preternaturally vivid consciousness which sometimes accompanies extreme physical exhaustion. And in the hours preceding her death Mary compassed her life since the days of her childhood, and, considering her sins, her sufferings, all through which she had passed, she weighed the losses and values of her experiences, and saw reflected within herself, as in a crystal, the eternal allegory

of the quest of all womankind. Enslaved, prostituted, and despised, she had traversed woman's long way of sorrow; hers had been the desire and the blind seeking of all women for the Light Unchangeable, the Love Eternal; hers had been all women's burden and heartache, all women's subjection to men's lusts, injustice, and condemnation; hers, too, the divine pardon and vindication of women; hers the promise of all women's emancipation and glorious redemption in the years to come.

During her life of penitential preparation in the desert Mary had gained in wondrous knowledge and spiritual power. At the door of death the lamp of her spirit was brilliantly burning. Overcoming herself and her carnal earth-nature, she had overcome the world, and the desires of the world. But this had not been without terrible struggles. For years after she retired to the wilderness she was beset by insupportable temptations. The flesh had grievously troubled her. At first her very privations seemed to whip to added fury the cravings of her grosser physical nature. In her dreams by night she re-lived the past; she again harangued the mobs from the terrace of the Serapium and gloated upon the suffering of the martyrs; again she pursued the Christians with her hatred, and sought love amid corruptions and iniquities; she reigned in her palace in Bruchcum, and gave herself to men she resented and abhorred. Waking, she was filled with horror and bitter remorse, and with all the fiercer ardor sought to purify herself with mortifications.

Day and night voluptuous visions taunted her imagination; the desert mirages presented delectable temptations. Often, as twilight fell, the date trees about her hut transformed themselves into the tall, lithe bodies of Nubians; they moved about her lasciviously and, bending, menaced her with abominations. Maximilian returned by moonlight, and breathed hotly into her ears, "Thy mouth, Mary, thy mouth!" Waking, sometimes she would find a jackal breathing foully and drooling saliva upon her face.

At midday she would see coming across the sands a youth, nude save for a leopard skin about his loins. In the sunlight his body was white as milk; his limbs resilient, his hips sway-

ing to and fro gracefully from side to side. He would embrace her, and as she struggled he would vanish. In the steaming heat-vapors she would behold hosts of horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men, clothed most gorgeously in attire dyed with vermillion; her fancy strained after them, and then with bitter self-reproach she would recall herself.

To purge herself of all physical desire, through the days, months, and years, she exposed her body to the blistering sun, covered her limbs with burning sand, flogged herself with whips of palm-fibre, lacerated her flesh, and beat her breasts with stones. In these mortifications she found no reason for pride; they were not, as with too many of the ascetics, the vain-glorious means of obtaining a reputation for piety and a saintly renown among others. Neither did Mary expect for these self-torments any celestial rewards. Mary did not seek nor desire a miraculous translation at death into a region of perpetual joy. She sought only to prepare herself for further lives of reparation before her—earthly incarnations which should be but continuous links of a conscious life everlasting in the love of Jesus Christ.

In that vast wilderness, far from humankind, Mary acquired a detached perspective upon all life. She had brought with her, when she came from Jerusalem, certain of the writings of Plato, of Plotinus, and the Gospel of St. John written on papyrus. These gave her food for study and meditation.

As Mary subjugated the flesh, her comprehension of the scope of life and the divine purpose of Creation expanded and deepened; she developed that spiritual sense of perception which sees beneath the appearance of things; the consciousness of her deeper spirit was quickened, and in flares of supernal inspiration Mary was given the understanding of hidden truths and favored with heavenly revelations. There were illuminating instants when, flashing upon her inner vision, she beheld a spectacle sublime and terrible—when the firmament blazed with a ganglia of fire-skeins, a maze of torrential rivers of flame weaving an inextricable and wondrous fabric throughout the universe—the veins and arteries of all creation pulsing with the life-force, the radiant energy of which constellations are



born and planets vitalized with life, and which, rushing from the ineffable Fountain Source of Being, from the burning Womb of God Himself, evolves throughout the spaces, upon the uncomprehending blankness and the dark, divine illusions, visions, creations, and stellar systems in the weaving of which a million years are as a day and a day as a million years,—in which, time existing, time exists not, and in which all things that shall be already are, and the things which are have already been.

There were moments of divine intoxication when thought, reason, emotion, and identity were swept away, when, with an insupportable ecstasy, Mary felt herself absorbed into the breath of God sweeping through and filling all space. There were blinding, swift-smiting instants again when she perceived herself and all things existing in God; when past, present, future, time and space, constellations within constellations, existences within existences, forms within forms, illusions within illusions, dreams within dreams, were contained within a living Presence, a Universal Soul which, as a limpid crystalline prism occupying all space, visioned within itself, by the reflection of its own Unchangeable Light, all things that change. . . . These were moments of incommunicable transport, when Mary seemed to share in the vibrant rapture of all living things, when the spaces rang with the mighty anthems of marching suns, when the breath of God, as a wind sweeping the lyres of the constellations, filled the universe with hymnal thunders of creative joy.

The integral and indissoluble relationship of all life was revealed unto her—from crawling reptiles to flying birds, from the fluid monad cell to man. She apprehended the permeating kinship of stones and stars, of water and fire, of matter and spirit, and appreciated as a verity that the dual forces of matter and spirit are akin, each partaking of and merging into the nature of the other, yet each antipodal and necessary to the manifestation of its opposite; both expressing their phenomena in million-fold gradations and variations of form. Mary beheld that the surface life of the world visible to men is only one of the infinite combinations of the dual elements—that there is a life of the air, a life of the water, a life of the

fire, a life of the ether, a life of the higher realms such as Plato had depicted, and lives beyond the morning star—altitudes which no flesh could assail. St. Paul had ascended through seven heavens. Mary sensed by the mystic intuitions of her spirit seven million times seven million heavens—states of being in the remote eternities whose august majesty no mortal could endure. Yet, unto the uttermost Empyrean, where God reigns in His Absolute Glory, where the All merges into the Nothing, and the cycle of being begins anew, into that awful vortex of consuming splendor wherein all is engulfed to be plunged again with a down-rushing descent into the darkness of the formless void,—unto that End which is the Beginning—Mary beheld the course of man, the ceaseless evolution and travail and joy of everlasting life. . . .

In contemplation Mary entered into myriad phases of conscious being. Attuning her spirit to that life-rhythm which quickens the earth, Mary stirred with the germinal flux of the world's springs and fructifying seasons, pulsed with the laboring thrill of seeds fermenting into life through barren fields, of flowers bursting into bloom, of leaves quivering beneath caressive rains. She melted with exquisite pleasure in the mating rapture of singing birds. She soared with the rush of the winds, exulted in the tumult of storms, and, with swelling freedom, respired with the breathing of the seas. Through the sweep of these vast panoramic divinations Mary beheld the evolution of the life-spark through all the multitude of visible forms; she saw the germinal essence like a vast ocean heaving up within the world of matter, in flux and reflux, take visible vesture through the earth in spring and ebb in winter as wave crests rise and break. She perceived the inchoate force assume its individual nucleus through earth-birth, condense its centre of being, and achieve its egoitic consciousness through a myriad incarnations.

From the amorphous cell to man she comprehended the evolution of the divine spirit toward the consummation of the vision of Jesus Christ for the spirit's redemption—an immortal existence with a continuing integrity of consciousness which should withstand the dis severing shock of physical death, a life everlasting wherein men should become as gods in the

sublime understanding of oneness with the all-permeating divine soul; the final transfiguration of the world and the ascension of all humankind as an army of Titan angels scaling realms upon realms, stars upon stars, heavens upon heavens, until they entered into God. In the struggle toward this stupendous translation of humanity, she realized she must take her part as sister, mother, teacher and loving ministrant of the race.

From out of her own experience she had learned the mysterious lesson of temptation and sin, and the conquering strength of rehabilitation and victory; that, in accordance to the depths into which one has sunk, so shall one, in rising from the depths and overcoming sin, gain in penetration of vision and superior power; that the profounder the fall, the higher the glory, and the greater the rejoicing among the choirs of heaven. Mary knew that the distraction of carnal indulgence and worldly desire, diverting the spirit from its concentrated upward climb, disintegrates and disperses its coalesced individuality, even as all human affection and love, imbued with and partaking of the leavening of the divine, strengthen and make invincible the spiritual entity. By loving as Christ had loved and by overcoming the world, out of the blind struggle with the chaos of material appearances and the brute passions of gross matter cleaving unto itself, the soul should emerge a "king of the city"—"a son of God." And in the coming æons her own utter expiation lay in leading those in darkness unto the light of that Sun which illumined her soul's pathway and—as she had suffered abominations and defilements in pandering to the carnal affinities of the flesh—in revealing the truth of that Love which is of the spirit and of the essence of the Celestial Father.

As she ascended heights beyond the morning star, so Mary descended unto depths of night where no stars are. There were dizzying, down-rushing moments of horror when she was hurled through abysses of hells. Even as Mary knew that the mightiest angels could fall, likewise did she know that the most unutterably miserable and perverted of the damned might turn their faces from iniquity and reascend the path of regeneration. Being immortal, she knew that the spirit must either

rise in beauty, love, and power, or sink in evil and misery. As she enjoyed the Unchangeable Light, Mary experienced the crushing horror of the Eternal Dark; as she beheld all things reflected and contained in God as in a burning crystal embracing illimitable time and space, she discovered therein the mysterious coexistence of good and evil, of heaven and hell, of salvation and damnation; assailing realms of supersplendent beauty and beatific happiness, she also plumbed pits of prodigious darkness and immitigable woe.

Evening—the evening of the world's day, and the evening of Mary's mortal life—drew nigh. With a wistful affection Mary watched the irid-winged creatures darting amid the foliage of the desert garden; with a faint melancholy tenderness she listened to the drumming of locusts and the humming of the world's bees. Her heart welled up as a fountain of gushing sweet water with gratitude for all that had been—yea, for all the suffering, all the shame, and all that she had gained therefrom. Mary realized that she stood upon the threshold of the Eternal. Its mystery was before her. She experienced the trembling awe, the bated, breathless, dreadful suspense of one on the brink of some stupendous adventure. Her mortal body at intervals resisted spasmodically with the involuntary physical recoil of one suspended over an abyss and about to fall. But with a confident calm, an indomitable hope, she waited, her hands crossed upon her bosom, utterly unafraid. She gazed upon the earth with a vast, embracing tenderness; for as the years had passed and her understanding had become more clear, an increasing and consuming love for all breathing, living things possessed her. All Nature had unveiled itself as the protean mirror of the Divine. Even as the Egyptian sages had found in the beetle a manifestation of the sacred essence of God, so Mary beheld in the most humble creatures—from insects to blooming flowers, from crawling reptiles to flying birds—evidences of the Divine Presence. Bees and dragon-flies, attracted by the sympathy she felt, alighted on her hands and flew about her as she walked in prayer. Scorpions and poisonous reptiles no longer had menace for her; lizards trailed after her footsteps as if

aware of one who abhorred no living thing. Leopards, panthers, and hyenas came to her hiding-place, and, making no attempt to harm her, became her subjects and her friends.

With a gaze of fond and vaguely sad farewell, Mary watched the sun drop in the firmament. The tropic night suddenly fell. A breath of refreshing coolness soothed Mary's brow. The swollen stars, fierily colored, panted in the sky. Mary prayed:

"Lord, Thy world is fair as the reflected smile of Thy dream! If such be Thy will, take me unto Thyself, that I may be refreshed in the living waters of Thy spirit! Let me be baptized in the living streams of Thy grace that, with renewed strength, I may come again and lead others unto Thee! Thou art the Way, Thou art the Light, Thou art the Truth of Love! . . . Thou art the Door of Life Eternal. . . . If such be Thy will, let me enter in . . . ."

An oppressive, awesome hush lay upon the world. Although there was no moon, the brilliancy of the desert stars flooded the atmosphere with a faint luminescence. The air was tautly still; not a leaf of the palm trees stirred.

Toward midnight, out of the silence and the distance, Mary slowly became aware of the approach of dim, inchoate blurs—they came out of the darkness in every direction, and as they neared the oasis they assumed bulk and concrete form. They came in serried processions, in innumerable numbers; they moved slowly and made no sound save that of the brittle flaking of sand cracking and the patter of moving feet. Pausing at a distance from where Mary lay, they outspread in a vast circle and crouched low to the earth. The apparition was indescribably weird. Mary watched with a dull amazement. Abruptly, and as one body, the circle of crouching creatures rose to their haunches—and a shrill, mournful, sustained howl pierced the stillness. Mary understood. The animals of the desert, in bereaved grief, had come to attend her death. The heart of the woman thrilled with a poignant tenderness and deep awe. After the prolonged outcry, they cringed low to the earth—panthers, leopards, wolves, wild goats, and hyenas—and waited in terror and expectancy. Slowly and by degrees

Mary became conscious, in the far remoteness of the wilderness, of the low, rhythmic wail of sobbing winds.

For a while she prayed softly; for a while she slept. Her vitality ebbed; her pulse-beat subsided.

Shrilly, dismally the wind wailed its anguish in the distance of the desert, now advancing with a hollow, hungry menace, now retreating and dying away with low-dwindling famished whines. For a long while there was silence. Then suddenly, as though it swept down from the very skies, pounding the air with its terrific wings, the blast of a belching tempest shook the palm trees, bending them to the earth and almost wrenching them from their roots. At the same instant, Mary, in waking, saw a monstrous tree upcurl a twisting spiral trunk from the desert's edge, and gigantically outspreading with appalling swiftness, it obscured the heavens unto the zenith. A blackish mist permeated the atmosphere.

In an instant the world seemed engulfed in a belching conflagration. Lashed by a yelling hurricane of wind, sharp as knives, clouds of black hail and smoke and raging flame swept over the desert. The heavens cracked with thunderings; lightnings, red as blood, licked the horizon. Scourged by wind and flame, and terrifically swept about in the infernal maelstrom, Mary beheld an innumerable spirit-host. The sound of their lamentations sharply rent the uproar of the elements. Quailing with horror and pity, Mary recognized the faces of many she had known upon the earth—lovers of the olden days, Christians who had stoned her, those with whom she had gone to Jerusalem; courtesans she had known of old, *debauchees* of the city, dancers, and prostitutes among whom she had mingled in fulsome inns. Whipped and whirled helplessly in that down-rushing vortex of blazing wind and stinging hail and cataclysmal fire, Mary beheld Archippus, his hands, feet, and heart eaten with gnawing flames; Niobides, convulsed, glaring with fixed terror upon a cross held rigidly aloft in his hand and invoking in despair the hissing wrath of his unforgiving God; a host of monks, condemned to sacrilegious revelry, howling obscene songs, groaning and weeping, and cursing the woman who had beguiled them, their faces devoured by loathsome leprosies, their eyes like calcined coals; grisly

harpies who had tormented Mary during the horrible days after her imprisonment; Seiggir, looming on the prow of a galley loaded with spoils, driven furiously in a tempest of thunder and lightning and a downpour of blood, and maniacally commanding his men to endless slaughter; Ben-Ezra, the Jew, laboriously counting gold that dripped in flame through his fingers; Caius Marcellus, drunk, bloated with excesses, calling Mary's name; Cyprian, writhing in the grip of a monstrous panther whose teeth crunched into his neck; the philosophers, Helius, Glauco, their brains burning with problems that tormented them to madness; Aristobolus, wearing a mitre, cursing his god and the woman who had wrought his ruin; Maximilian, his fair body mangled, yet hoarsely screaming, "Thy mouth—give unto me thy mouth."

With searing flashes, Mary recalled features familiar in other lives—princesses with whom she had sat at banquet in the perished cities of the Nile, kings of perished kingdoms, warriors, leaders of armies. . . . Mary's image still pursued them. Through interminable ages they remembered her, some obsessed with ravening desire, others with a rancorous, unforgiving, unrelenting hate. There were those who had wronged her, and others whom she had wronged; those who had betrayed her, and those whom she had betrayed. Swept as dust-atoms in that volcanic chaos, each seemed unaware and unheeding of the others; each, devoured by foul concupiscence, or despair, or vengeance, or hatred, was alone in the hell of his own passion. Each seemed astray in an obliterating night which, unlike the soothing dark of earth, was crimson as blood, yet without light, suffocating, blank, and blind. They were tormented, relentlessly pursued and preyed upon by the demoniac illusions created of their own desires—phantasms of unattainable delights and the baleful chimeras of their secret sins, vampire horrors with the shape of bats, slimily crawling serpents, grisly reptiles, gigantic carrion birds that slashed the air with mange-eaten, wet-dripping wings, shapeless abominations that heaved loathsomely and oozed corruption, and gruesome shades that took terrifying form and dissolved. Comprehending the goading anguish and blind despair of that piteous host, Mary's soul ached to its depths. Desperate,

imploring, with a mighty urgency Mary lifted her spirit in prayer:

“Lord, Lord! Out of the depths I cry unto Thee! Lord, hear Thou my voice! Lord, I love these Thy lost sheep as Thou hast loved me! For the wrongs I have done them, I ask forgiveness even as for the wrongs that they have done me I ask that they be forgiven! Lord, they are prisoners of darkness, and exiled from Thy love, and suffer in the fires of their sins self-kindled, and are sore troubled by the spectres of their hell! Oh Lord, by the multitude of Thy tender mercies be merciful unto them! Lord, Thou canst enter that prison barred not with iron! I beseech Thee, send the spirit of Thy love unto them! Lord, with Thee there is mercy! With Thee there is plenteous redemption! Thou hast said if the dead hear Thy voice yet they shall live! Lord, let them hear Thy voice! Lord, these are my brothers! Grant, if such may be, that I may go unto them in their misery and declare Thy name! If such may be, let me endure their torments, that they may be turned unto Thee! Oh Lord, assuage their anguish! Let them see Thy light! Let them hear Thy word. Let them be enfolded in Thy love!”

While she prayed, projecting her soul forth with upward-straining appeal, the awful clamor, the soul-rending lamentations and outcries subsided and died away. An expectant hush gripped the world of the living and the world of the dead. The whirlwind quelled, the crimson fires paled; the infernal clouds rolled up and dissolved as smoke. Arrested in their driving flight, the great host paused betwixt earth and sky, their frenzy of torment lulled, gazing wildly before them, startled, amazed, and wondering, like dazed creatures wakened from a nightmare of haunted delirium.

Imperceptibly, softly, quickly, a tender auroral radiance sifted through the atmosphere, illumining world and sky with a luminance pale as pale moonbeams. In the ethereal glow the faces that a moment before had mirrored inordinate anguish, rage, hatred, foul lust and unseeing despair were magically transformed; the pain, the hideous leers, the unclean monstrosities, the convulsed torture, vanished in a beauteous calm, and their eyes, alive and shining, glowed with the glory



of a hope celestial, more radiant than any dawn. As if directed by the irresistible and compelling impetus of Mary's prayer, the faces of that mighty host lifted as flowers rise to greet the sun and, turning from their cherished iniquities, roused from their self-imposed horrors, from their death-trance of obsessing misery and despair, they yearned upwards, their arms extended with desiring appeal, their faces transfigured and inspired with the smiling delight and hope in a heavenly promise revealed.

Gazing upwards, with a marvelling joy, Mary herself beheld over the world's horizon, bathing earth and sky in a flood of supernal radiance, a cross of blazing flame. From the distant heavens, from the heart of the fire, a Voice spake:

*"Peace. . . . My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. I am come to seek and to save that which is lost, and whosoever believeth in Me shall have everlasting life. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you; abide in Me, and I in you. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love!"*

Lifted in a cloud of glory, their faces beaming with angelic joy, that vast host, awakened and redeemed in the revelation of self-regeneration by love, were carried upward, and thus faded, as they rose, in the growing splendor of the cross.

"Lord, my soul hath relied on Thy word; my soul hath hoped in Thy love! Lord, Thy will be done unto me!"

The firmament seemed to split with a mighty thundering, and the Voice called:

*"Mary, arise!"*

Into a calm deeper than the calm of waters, into a peace sweeter than the peace of fragrant gardens untroubled by any wind, into a hush that enfolded her in affectionate embrace, Mary, rising upward from her trance, merged into her last period of earth-consciousness.

Profound silence lay upon the world. All life, all movement, seemed to have drifted into a balmy rest as ineffably

sweet as a child's sleep. A delicious sweet-smelling savor as of fields of flowers dreaming beneath the moon filled the air. Breathing deeply with a wondrous relief, Mary gazed about in dazed bewilderment and then, with a low, rapturous murmur, rose to a sitting posture on her pallet. Over the world's horizon, symbol of the life that surmounts the grave, the love that transcends death, beamed the cross of silver flame, still, intense, serene. . . .

"Lord, Lord! . . . Thou art the true Light . . . which lighteth every man . . . that cometh unto the world. . . . Thou art the Love . . . that condemneth not . . . but ever forgives. . . . Thou art the door of life everlasting. . . . Lord . . . if such be Thy will . . . let me . . . enter . . . in. . . ."

Creeping out of the earth, a breathing of enthralling, soft, sweet music filled the air. Gently, imperceptibly, as fragrances wafted by impalpable winds, it pulsed up about Mary, lulling her senses with its caressive tenderness, and, swelling softly, seemed to gather within its volume the dancing, sprite-like joy of budding things, of flowers bursting into bloom, of wisping leaves trembling beneath dew and sun; it embraced, as it swelled and swelled, the rapture of carolling birds, the harping of summer winds, the fluting of purling rains and gushing streams. The very earth seemed to respire with that throbbing melody in which were merged the movements of all existence—the luting of mating love, the pæans of new birth, the croon of mothers' tender hearts, the melancholy dirge of death; and, through an undertone of sobbing sadness, through all that cosmic music, mounted higher and higher, as a leaping fountain of silver light, humanity's triumphant song of hope, undying and eternal. The arms of the great cross shimmeringly dilated and widened. From the crux of the argent beams leaped livid bolts of azure lightning. Rising from the horizon, vast rainbow coronals wavered to and fro athwart the sky, their lucent arcs fanning the heavens. Out of the heart of the desert flared streaming shafts of purple incandescence, igniting the air with a blinding brilliance. The atmosphere scintillated with a diaphanous film of sifting diamond dust-atoms. The desert shone like a field of burning snow. Along the hori-

zon majestically moved a glorious phantasmal pageant—militant armies bearing blazing pennons and battle-banners, irid, red, and golden. From nadir to zenith hosts of celestial beings soared on pinions of boreal glory. Their faces were as burning suns.

*"Whoso believeth on Me shall live forever: believest thou this?"*

As if all the stars of the universe were raining through the firmament, the zenith blazingly shimmered with a golden panoply of sweeping fire.

Almost swooning, Mary breathed:

*"Yea, Lord . . ."*

The very doors of heaven seemed riven asunder, and with the sound of harps, and the sound of lyres, and the sound of timbrels, and the sound of thunder, and the sound of mighty waters, and the sound of voices swelling with apocalyptic jubilation, tumultuous surging swells of magnificent music pounded and beat upon the earth. The earth beneath, the vaulted sky above, throbbed like vibrant shells, reassembling and re-echoing the sounding triumphance of onward-marching, victorious, heavenly armies. Cleaving that thunderous throbbing, Mary heard the beatific Voice:

*"Come up hither: I will show thee things which must be hereafter!"*

Through the silverly gleaming world, stretching across the desert like the molten reflection of sunset on the sea, blazed a fiery path of ruby gold. Leaping, singing, ringing, jubilantly pealing as if welcoming their bride, Mary heard the dilating swells of celestial bells.

Piercing the tremendous concourse of sound, the Divine Voice spake with a keen sweetness:

*"Behold, thou hast been faithful in a few things: I will give thee charge over many things. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the middle of the Paradise of God; I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end: to him will I give power over the nations. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set*

*down with the Father in His throne. He that overcometh shall inherit all things. MARY, ARISE!"*

Clarion peals of triumphal trumpets clanged through the heavens like summoning angel-calls.

Charged with a terrific impetus of revitalizing vigor, an invincible strength, Mary's flesh seemed to melt as wax in fire and drop from her. No longer oppressed by the weakness and frailty of her body, expanding with a buoyant sense of winged freedom, she slowly rose from her bed and stood upon her feet, shuddering, trembling, waiting.

Transcending mortal consciousness, her soul dilated in a dissolving intoxication, an insupportable rapture, until it seemed she entered into the living breath of God that sweeps through all space and comprehends infinite time. Abolished and diffused in a divine transmutation, an exaltation surpassing mortal experience, she was consumed in an ecstasy, immense, annihilating, supreme.

"Lord! Lord!" her soul cried out in joy. "Lord, I love Thee. . . . Lord, I love all that is in Thee. . . . Lord, Lord, take me. . . . Take me unto Thee! . . ."

The great cross, outspreading fanwise athwart the skies, divided asunder within itself as opening gates of silver. Within, looming afar beyond the world, in sovereign glory and awful majesty, His arms outstretched with infinite, immeasurable, and all-desiring love, Mary beheld the supreme figure of the Lord Jesus Christ descending on a path of lightnings from the golden-burning depths of heaven.

And with pulsantly caressive sweetness, a tenderness beyond all human tenderness, the well-remembered, well-loved Voice thrilled:

*"Come unto Me, Mary! Be thou My bride!"*

Entranced, enraptured, drawn irresistibly toward the beatific vortex of the Vision, Mary moved away from her pallet, away from the oasis, away from her abiding-place of earth. Her arms yearningly outstretched, blind to the world, engulfed in glory, as one who walks enrapt in a dream, she passed . . . slowly . . . very slowly . . . into the night

and onward across the desert . . . amid the roll of thunder and the tremor of lightnings.

That night a terrific sandstorm swept the Arabian wilderness. And when, some time thereafter, the monk Zozimus, of the community of St. John the Baptist on the Jordan, carrying with him a chalice and paten containing the most sacred and holy elements, whereof he desired to partake with Mary, arrived at the oasis, he saw the great palm trees had been snapped from their stems, the garden had become a place of barrenness, and the hut he had observed there a year before was utterly buried in the sands. Stricken with remorse and self-reproach in the memory of his harsh, condemning intolerance and proud, incompassionate piety, Zozimus fell upon his knees, seeking the grace of God in prayer, tears of contrition and tenderly loving regret falling from his eyes. For thus, and by the signs about him, Zozimus knew that she who had been known as Mary, a woman of the city of Alexandria and a great sinner, was no longer upon the earth, but that, redeemed and glorified, a saint had entered heaven.

**EPILOGUE**  
**TO THE PRESENT-LIVING REINCAR-**  
**NATION OF MARY OF ALEXANDRIA**

**AVE!**



## SALUTATION

*And to-night, Mary, high above the mountain solitude where I have my earthly home, paling the golden stars and silvering the sinuously winding river, the moon shines . . . yea, as the planets' perpetual death-lamp the moon shines to-night as it shone through the palace casement upon your banquet five hundred and a thousand years ago, as a thousand and five hundred years before it shed its argent irony upon the feasts of the Pharaohs and their princesses in the proud and perished cities of the Nile. Deeply are those cities buried in the grave of time, and the rumors of your beauty and your glory, Mary, have passed away from earth.*

*Even as in those days when the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and breathed life into an inanimate planet, so the moon gleams undimmed in cold tranquillity to-night; yea, as once on a memorable night in the history of the earth's time it softly bathed the little hill of Calvary and revealed three stark black crosses looming in sinister relief against the sky.*

*There is a haunting witchery in the moon, Mary—in the melancholy memories it conjures, in the vistas of perished aeons which fugitively it recalls. As dim dreams that glimmer and pass, as wan wraiths evoked from the labyrinths of the spirit's deeper reaches, a faint phantasmal pageant passes about my mountain solitude. As I muse alone, above the tree-tops and beneath the stars, the burden of lonely-seeking centuries upon my soul, I wonder whether you too sit somewhere afar on this earth, Mary, and peer with wistful wonder upon the moon. . . .*

*Can you recall when first we met, Mary, in paradisial gardens when the world was young? . . . Then the Eternal Woman seeking, Mary, beyond the lusts of men and their mean ambitions, beyond Nature's mating urge, yours was the quest of a diviner knowledge, of a love everlasting, without sin, without stain. Men hated you even then as they loved you; cursed you as they caressed you. As you brought the sons of*



men into the world and gave them to suck of your breast, as you cradled and cherished and loved them, so men despised and oppressed you and stoned you. You were Eva, the beginning of sin, the burden-bearer of all men's iniquities, of all the world's evil. But yours was the lore of the serpent, Mary; yours the empurpled wisdom that inspired a superior vision, that goaded to a loftier quest, that gave you softness and subtlety and cunning—all that was your baleful beauty, your strange, mysterious allure. And to those who trod upon you, to the nations and races that subjugated and used you, terrible was your vengeance, terrible was your sting.

Scapegoat of the world and victim of men, you have been eminent in glory, eminent in wisdom, eminent in shame. Eternal spirit of woman, you have been slave; you have been harlot; you have been mother; you have been debaucher and destroyer, queen, priestess, and seer. Do you remember the fierce, wild days when you led warriors into battle, when captive nations marched in the shackles of your triumphal train? Can you remember that barbaric age when unto the throne of Balkis, the beautiful, the splendid, the kings of the world and the wisest came with caravans bearing vessels of gold and silver, jewels, the feathers of birds, and spices?

Do you ever feel the memoried ache of the embraces of those who pressed your breasts in Egypt, of the paramours who bruised the teats of your virginity? Princess of the golden city, do you recall being enamoured of the strange men portrayed upon your walls—Chaldeans with girdles, attired in vermillion, princes to look upon? . . . Do you remember the lovers who came unto your bed of love from Babylon—captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men, for whom you washed yourself in milk, and painted your eyes, and decked yourself with ornaments? You sat upon a stately bed, with a table prepared before it, with incense, and burning lamps, and wine. And there were also brought unto you men of the common sort. . . . Abased but immortal woman, did they not then turn against you, were their minds not alienated from you, did they not strip you of your clothes, and take away your jewels, laugh at you in scorn and derision, and judge you after the

*manner of an adulteress, and stone you with stones? . . . Was it not ever thus in the East and the West, and the North and the South? . . . Did not men love you only to curse you; caress you only to stone you . . . year after year, age after age? . . .*

*In the moonlight I can vision a bulky edifice looming cumbersomely against a greenly amber sky . . . and the shadows of mountainous terraces, and the Euphrates dangling like a thread of gold across a plain of sand. Now the king made a feast to his princes, his concubines, and his thousand lords, and wine was spilled from the holy cups to gods of brass, of wood, of stone. Do you ever hear in your dreams the ribald revelry and wild clamor of that night when you entered the banquet-house and beheld the drunken, stupefied terror of the king, his princes and nobles at the magical writing on the plaster of the wall? Amid the confusion and panic, you alone gave wise counsel unto the king, your spouse, . . . and of all his wives and concubines, you alone wept over his body in the derision of the golden dawn. . . How often have you not wept, in the derision of the dawn! Do you ever wander in vague memory in that city of wisdom and beauty, of learning and philosophy, where joyous processions hailed the coming of the spring? Through the streets, amid colonnaded palaces of marble, the populace, in robes of multi-colors, passed scattering flowers. Children swung censers, youths and maidens, lithe-limbed and white, played the flute and plucked the lyre. They laughed, they danced, they sang. 'Twas then, one morn of a feast of spring, that you drew back on the terrace of your palace, a haunting, world-old misery in your eyes, and you spoke of your insatiety and heartache and the desire of such love as you, much-loved, had never known. Famed for your wisdom, famed for your beauty, even then, oh woman, was your love despised. You gained much wisdom in those days, Mary; of women's arts of thrall upon the hearts of men you were schooled by one, more than the worldly, wise. Well can I recall the banquets, and the singing, and the little Syracusan boy, and the maid who danced amid sword blades, and the sallies of wit and the laughter, and the discussions of diviner things: in those days were Plato, Phædrus, and*

*Alcibiades, and Socrates was your mentor and your friend. But neither philosophy nor wisdom allayed the fermenting fever within your blood, the famine of your heart. . . . Then—then, oh beloved Mary, after a nightmare sleep of death, came our waking to the sweet, calm days of peace which we shall ne'er forget, neither you nor I.*

*Can you not remember a benign night of stars by a flowing river, and the golden voice and the gentle hands that soothed the ache of centuries away? . . . Mary, Mary, never was there such music in all the world! Softer than the lisp of leaves on summer nights, more caressive in its tenderness than a mother's lips upon her babe at birth, I hear His voice—yea, as remembered music it breathes ineffably down the world's long years. . . . You had been a wanton of the streets; you had loved much and men condemned you. But One had come who loved not as men love, who revealed unto the world such love as it had never, never known. Mary, can you picture the grove of olive trees upon the little hill, and the old gnarled tree whereunder we sat by night and spake together? In the distance, beyond a vale, Jerusalem lay, miasmatically phosphorescent in its moribund arrogance and bigot tribal pride. Low in the sky the moon reclined, and afar we beheld the palace of Pontius Pilate and the pompous temple with its doors of beaten gold. There were laughter and merrymaking in the city; in the palace of Pilate and the inns there were revelry and dancing. Yea, revelry and dancing as to-night there are revelry and dancing in the pleasure-places of the cities of the world; then men did not know, as many to-night do not know, of the transcendent love One came to teach the world—the love of the spirit, that is the bread of life everlasting, and which alone can feed the vastly aching hunger of the heart. . . .*

*Can you not see the tall Figure approaching in the moonlight, austere beautiful, sublimely sad, the burden of the world's sins and sorrows upon His soul? Can you not see His face, fair as a child's, encompassing the gentle loveliness and all the dreamed-of beauty of the world? Do you recall how we started when we espied Him coming toward us, when we felt His lustrous and consuming gaze? His eyes were blue, bluer*

*than the rivers of the sea, Mary, and redder than the roses of the dawn were His lips. His hair was palely golden and enmeshed the light o' moon and stars. Do you remember, Mary! Mary! how He opened wide His arms?—We felt the lips of God impress a holy kiss upon our hearts! And ah, when His hands in benediction touched us—'twas then and through Him we entered into the conscious life that quickens surface things, that we thrilled to the germinating rapture of creation, the transport of Nature in its seasons, of flowering fields and singing stars, that we pulsed to the tumultuous music of the throbbing arteries of God. How tenderly He spake unto us! For He knew our yearning and our seeking. "Come unto Me, ye that are weary and heavily laden, and I will give you rest." 'Twas then of joy, Mary, you sank upon the earth and bathed His feet with tears. . . .*

*Spirit of eternal woman, abased, despised, One lifted you from the earth and bade you rise! Condemned by men, One justified you by your love and your desire! Calumniated as the beginning of all sin, the sewer of lusts, One came who protected you from men's stones! Oh, woman forgiven, unto you did He appear on the world's first Easter morn, bidding you go forth with the glad tidings that Truth was risen from the dead! Unto His brethren and your brethren were you to go and say that love and mercy had ascended and should rule eternally in heaven! Harbinger of love's victorious resurrection, unto you was given His supreme message to the race of men.*

*Great was your fall, but abiding your experience, Mary, in those days when men hailed you as the glory of Egypt, the star of the Alexandrian sky! None among women was so famed as you, none among women so shamed. Yours was the glory of purple and scarlet, yours the golden cup. Men spoke your praise in far seas; yours was the brief splendor and power of some capricious, luxurious queen. Well do I remember the colonnaded streets and the plane trees withholding the heat of the afternoon sky. Borne in your palanquin of cedar-wood and silver, youths and maidens followed, singing. As faint echoes through the ages I can hear the salutations now. "Rose of Bruchheim!" "Gate of ivory to the*

*Garden of Pleasure!" "Glory of Egypt!" "Hail! Hail!"*  
... And those darker haunts of infamy along the quay of Eunostus—the ragged hags of women, the spectres of that nightmare world of vice, and the rubicund sailors from far seas and ploughboys from the muddy stretches of the Nile! Those were grotesque and grisly revelries, Mary—but you found fierce thrills and perverse delights therein! And that awful holocaust of the Christian martyrs—closing my eyes I can see the porphyry pillars of the Serapium, bearing their crucified victims, and hear amid the crackle of the flames the haunting voice of the golden-haired boy as he died—"Grant us in life Thy helping grace, grant us in death to see Thy face, And endless joy inherit!" . . . Do you recall a night when we sailed, in your gilded barge, on Lake Mareotis? Far off Alexandria loomed, blinking a million eyes. Above us the stars drooped pendulously and jewel-wise, and all about on the velvet waters lilies breathed their argent rapture into the night. We spoke of love and death, of the love for which your spirit hungered and which no mortal gave. . . . Ah, even in that life, Mary, yours was but the quest of all woman-kind, and of all men born of women.

And yet, through the darkness of this other fall, the Divine Voice spake again, bidding you rise and go forth bearing His tidings to the world. Yea, and through those blind ages of a sterile faith, when the souls of men were bound in ignorance by superstitious forms, and the world languished in bigot intolerance and unrelieved despair, you came again and yet again, ever His messenger and ministrant. Unto oppressed serfs of impoverished baronies, a queen, you bore the mystical roses of your charity; unto the outcast lepers of the Umbrian cities you went with love and washed the sores of flesh and soul away; unto the heathen islands of the North, across the storm-swept seas, a Norman maiden, you bore the word of God; distrusted and despised despite your noble service by the arrogant oligarchy of the priests, your soul bloomed forth with conquering faith beyond the Pyrenees, where you founded and ruled the most powerful sisterhood in the Christian world. With prayer and self-denial your gracious armies of militant women went throughout the nations, unto the poor

*in spirit, feeding the hungry, caring for the betrayed in love, their infants and orphans, tending the aged and infirm, healing the sick, soothing the dying, comforting those who mourned, bringing peace unto strife, ever carrying the Word unto the generations; in hospice and on battle-field, amid carnage and devastation, you accomplished in a war of selfless love that wherein men had failed. . . . And yet again, the holy love of humankind lightening your eyes, I can see you moving at twilight over battle-fields. The sky is of the color of burning blood. Far away sound the awful thunder and roar of bursting shells, and all about, groaning and crying aloud in mortal anguish, a field covered with the awful fruit of battle—human bodies broken, torn, mangled, weltering in pools of blood. And you, sister, saint, consoler, passing among them, soothing away the visions of delirium, breathing into the ears of the dying the hope of that immortal triumph beyond the triumph of battles, of that immortal glory beyond all glory of mortal achievement—yea, the hope for the life and love that last in *sæcula sæculorum*. . . .*

*Courtesan and saint, yours has been a wondrous career through the world, Mary. Yours the spiritual allegory of the race! Oh woman clothed in scarlet, oh virgin swathed in garments of burning snow! Oh bride of the Eternal Love! Enduring for ages the contumely and contempt of the men who debauched and plundered you, you bore the burden of women's shame and men's hypocrisy; yours was the struggle and the anguish of exploited and misused womankind. Yours, in bringing again to the world the message of Love's Resurrection, has been the work of righting the wrongs of men and laboring in a service of love toward the redemption of the race.*

*And now, Mary, after the purging pilgrimage of ages, you have become victorious in your purified and established womanhood. A woman of the city and a great sinner, you heard the Voice of Divine Love bidding you to rise. Unto men did you bear the tidings that God is the Father of all and that, over men's injustices, hatred, persecutions, yea over crucifixion, Love should forever and invincibly prevail. Henceforth, oh woman, you shall share in the councils and progress of the*

*world; you shall serve, you shall teach, you shall share in the governing of nations. Under your feet shall you crush the head of the old serpent—the cleaving of men unto the world and the flesh. Oh woman with the virginal torch in your hand, henceforth shall you light the world with justice that is all-understanding and merciful, love that is tender, and wisdom that, being gained from sorrow, is most compassionately kind! Unto the world, torn by war, perchance you shall bring again, to the men who have forgotten, the message that all men are brothers and shall love one another, and assure, when the slaughter of warfare is over, a reign of perpetual peace!*

*Yea, and you shall lead armies beyond the world! For yours is the love, the ideal, the vision that transcends the grave! Yours the militant and conquering spirit that shall invade the kingdoms of the stars.*

*And what beyond . . . Mary? . . . As for the past, ours has been a tedious and laborious struggle; we have peered through the gates of many heavens, we have been punished and purged in the fires of many hells. Methinks, Mary, that with the up-toiling, triumphant evolution of the soul, with greater capacities for joy, there shall be more infinite capacities for service and achievement. Methinks that there shall be mightier trials, mightier sorrows, mightier travails in the higher realms beyond the earth—yea, we shall find many Titan women weeping along the golden highway of the stars. . . . Yet this we know: the more testing the labors that await us, the vaster shall be the joy of accomplishment. The lives beyond the door of death fascinate me with their mystery, their terror, their baffling allure. For there must be stupendous adventures among the stars—yea, and as there is the promise of transcendent triumphs, so must there also await us anguished heartbreaks and vast-aching, tragic losses within the happiest kingdoms of the Milky Way.*

*Yet I do not desire peace, Mary, nor the secure quiescent rest of any heaven of unaspiring content. Nor, I ween, must you. The dream of perpetual blessedness must be only the comforting illusion of poor spirits grown too weary; a dreaming and a resting, yes—scented havens and cool bowers on greenly golden stars where the tired pilgrims of the eternities*

*may pause; generous hostelries where the blue wine of the infinities is poured from the cups of planets cooled in eternal snow by angel ministrants comforting the footsore of the upward climb. But in all the universe, as here, no thing in itself can last; there, as here, is inaction death; and only struggling and loving and laboring the means of eternal life. Perchance our unassuaged desire, our unappeasable aspiration is but the reflection of the desire and aspiration of the Eternal. Methinks that God must be spurred to creation by a desire as infinite as He is infinite; that, within the vastness of His burning bosom—whence constellations, stars, worlds, and souls spring into being—He must Himself suffer with some irremediable, infinite, unassuageable ache. Who knoweth of the yearnings, the desires, and the sorrows of God!*

*And beyond, as here, we shall perchance seek the peace that shall be only for a stellar night, yearn for the all-desired that shall only briefly come, only again and again to elude us, ache with the eternal creative urge for the achievement of the ideal that shall never be fully attained; and pursue the illusion of the spaces that shall never utterly unveil itself. And thus, through birth and death, from star to star, heaven to heaven, through realms of existence undreamed-of, un beholden, shall we frenziedly whirl in endless quest of that divine will-o'-the-wisp that goads, beguiles, and bewitches constellations, suns, comets, and stars onward in their burning chase across the abysses of time and space. For this I believe:*

*Redeemed from this world, and with humanity disen thralled, we shall fare forth as exploring voyagers for new and undiscovered realms. What of the storms of those uncharted oceans of the infinite! What of the distresses and paralyzing darknesses! What of the thunders and lightnings of the contending legions of the angels and the demons of God! This we know—having been faithful in our labors here, having sinned and suffered and wrought strength from very defeat, neither there shall we fail nor falter; neither there shall we be encompassed in darkness or be lost utterly: nay, in the fiercest storms of those celestial oceans of the infinite we shall not meet with harm nor go astray so long as our spirit galleon be guided by an aspiring and upward-straining love. . . .*



*Mary, sister Mary, strange and wonderful were the lives we lived and the experiences we endured together; yet, beyond the twilight veils of the future, lives and experiences await us—vaster, stranger, and more wondrous still! . . . Mary, eternal woman, where'er you are, over many mountains, over many waters, into all nations, I salute you! Hail!*

*About me broods the taut silence of the night. The winding river shimmers like a dangling thread of silver—even as, in olden ages, before us shimmered the Euphrates, the Orontes, and the Nile. Down in the valley, like a nest of glow-worms, twinkle the lights of a village; there, within a little cup of earth, is enacted the eternal tragedy of humankind. There, men in their petty struggles meet defeat, attain their insignificant successes; there they love and hate, intrigue and exploit one another; they sing, they laugh, they weep; children are born, youths and maidens wander hand in hand along the country roads in spring, they wed, bring children into life, they die. . . . And to what end? To what end this ceaseless germination and procreation, this travail and toiling, these seasons of loving and suffering and anguish of dying? Life, everlasting in its essence, ever changes: years come and go, centuries merge into æons: little villages in the sheltering green cups of earth decay, imperial cities crumble into dust, empires are no more. . . . To what end the loving, the agony and the labor, the shame and the glory, the triumphs and the defeats, the indefatigable seeking of the soul of man? To what end, save in the vision beheld by you, immortal woman: the vision of love, eternal, alluring, in its consummation ever afar: to what end save greater glory, greater sorrow, greater service, greater love. . . . Out of the silver river the face of one loved more than all the world gleams luringly, out of the stillness a voice . . . a tender, well-remembered, well-loved voice is calling . . . calling . . . unto me. Yea, and I think of you to-night, Mary, with a poignant tenderness, a consoling reassurance: for the aching of a heart bereaved and desolate you, too, have known. . . .*

*Yea, Mary, upon our nights of love, upon our nights of forlorn sorrow, the moon shines . . . inexorably calm . . . unchanging . . . and forever. . . .*

*VE.*









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